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# 魔女の旅々

THE JOURNEY OF ELAINA

THE JOURNEY OF ELAINA  
MAJO NO TABITABI

VOLUME 1

Written by Jogi Shiraishi  
Illustrated by Azul



その可憐な少女は魔女であり、旅人でした。  
——そう、私です。

The pretty girl was a witch and was a traveler.

## 灰の魔女イレイナ

弱冠15歳で魔法使いの最高位  
『魔女』の称号を得た、天才少女。





「私も忘れませんよ、皆さんのこと」



星屑の魔女フラン  
イレイナの師匠

「あなたの旅を心から応援しています。  
どうか、そのことを忘れないで」

# CREDITS



その可憐な少女は魔女であり、旅人でした。  
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## CHAPTER 1

# A COUNTRY OF MAGICIANS



## PART 1

On the savage mountain district, that country stood isolated.

Because it was surrounded by tall walls, it was not possible to examine it from the outside.

At the top of the stone surface hot from sunlight, a single broom was flying and cutting through the lukewarm atmosphere as it advanced.

The one manipulating the broom was a single lovely girl, clad in black robe and a tricorne while her ashen hair shook in the wind.

Just who in the world was that girl who possessed such beauty that if there were people around, anyone turn their heads in awe.

That's right, It's me.

Just kidding.

"...Just a little bit more."

The tall walls appeared to be constructed by shaving off what was originally a mountain. A gate could be seen just by shifting one's line of sight down. I am pointing my broom towards it.

Well, it seems like a troublesome place for a country, but, this was what they had in mind—No one would make a mistake and carelessly enter. After all, unless circumstances called for it, no one would ever come in a country built in such a place.

After arriving at the gate, I descended from my broom. A guard at the gate tasked to carry out inspections for entrances to the country came to greet me.

After slowly examining me to the tips, he returned his gaze to the brooch on my chest then showed a wide smile.

"Welcome to the country of Magicians. Please proceed inside, Witch-sama."

"? Eh? Is is fine not to verify whether I'm a Magician or not?"

All visitors must show Magic to the gate guard to enter. If their ability wasn't satisfactory, permission to enter the town would not be granted. Thus I asked that kind of question.

"It's because I saw you flying here. Besides, that brooch undoubtedly belongs to a Witch. Please proceed inside."

So that's it. That's what it was. Looks like properly flying on brooms was the minimal requisite to enter the country. Now that I think about it, my advance was clearly visible from this gate. So embarrassing.

After giving a small nod to the gate guard, I proceeded to pass through the giant gate.

Here is the country of Magicians. Mages, Apprentice Witches, Witches—In short, it's a country with a strange rule of not letting anyone other than Magicians enter it.

After passing through the gate, I got puzzled.

There were two strange signboards standing next to each other.

One of the signboard showed a Magician mounting the boom inside a circle. Next to it was a walking soldier inside a triangle.

What's with these signboards?

But I immediately understood the answer as I looked above—Above the crowded brick houses, or perhaps just below the sun, Magicians were flying about.

I see - I got it.

It seems to be a special rule of a country that allowed only Magicians to enter. Everyone was flying in the vicinity while only a handful of people walked on the ground.

Understanding the meaning of the sign, I took out my broom and sat on it sideways. Kicking the ground, I slowly floated up.



If I had to express the meaning of the signs with simple words:

"It's an endorsement to fly in the air, isn't it—"

And thus, the country of Magicians truly showed up.

Magicians were flying above the reddish brown roofs that were spread out like withered land.

Starting from people who had their brooms stopped and having a friendly chat, people who tied luggage to brooms, to an old woman who looked like a suspicious Witch. Even figures of children who dashed in the air having a contest of speed - They seem to be enjoying a life in the sky.

It's a very warming scene, even to the point of awe.

Blending with them, I soared above the country. As I was absentmindedly flying about, I suddenly caught a sight of a signboard that was put above a roof. An "Inn" it seems. After passing by it, next appeared a word "Greengrocer". Aside from it, there were things like "Butcher" and "Jewelry". As expected, they were for the "life among the skies" alone. Putting a signboard above the rooftops seems to be a common thing.

At closer inspection, there were windows where a single person could pass through embedded on the roofs of most houses. As I gazed at it blankly, a man suddenly jumped out from inside through the window gap, and got on his broom. In short, It's something like that.

I leisurely flew about, enjoying the country's scenery.

What could be called a change, happened shortly after that.

"Nooooooooooooooooooooo!"

A scream resounded from behind.

I held my broom with one hand and looked back as I held my hat down so it wouldn't be blown away.

And then, "T-Too late" I thought.

"Aaaahhhhhhhh!"

Someone was flying towards me in a straight line while screaming and scattering tears. But the moment I saw that, there was only a roof's distance between us.

Can I evade it? Impossible.

Although I instinctively bent my upper body, as expected, collision was unavoidable. With unladylike screams like "Ugyaa" and "Uge", that person and I entangled and fell towards the rooftop. We peeled away some of the arranged roof tiles and before long, we stopped just on the verge of falling from the roof. Looking down, one broken roof tile lay upon the ground. It's fortunate that there were no pedestrians there.

Because of the inadequate angle, I avoided the head-on collision, and thanks to this mysterious flying person who took the damage from collision with tiles, I haven't sustained injuries.

I stood up while brushing off the reddish brown fragments attached to my black robe.

"....."

"Ugogogogo....."

Leaking a strange groan with closed eyes was a teenage girl that seemed to be slightly younger than me. She had average features and evenly-cut, short black hair. She wore a white blouse and checkered skirt under the black mantle. Because she got caught up below me, they got splendidly torn apart.

Since there was nothing like a brooch attached on her chest, perhaps she is a mage.

".....Um, are you alright?"

As I touched the shoulder of the collapsed girl, she opened her eyes.

"....."

"....."

And, silence.

Even though I don't understand the circumstances, I said "A poor handling of a broom, eh?"

I think it's cynical. Yes.

".....Ah"

"It seems your head finally started working." I made a smiling face.

"Awawawawa." She once again closed her eyes. "W-w-w-w-what to do. What should I do? I can't fix so many roof tiles alone....."

Oh?

"Before that, shouldn't you apologize?"

"Ah, I-I'm Sorry! It was not on purpose! I swear!"

I can see that.

"By the way, you, are you alright? Given that you flew so splendidly."

"Ah, I'm alright! I look this lively after all!"

That.

She was saying that while red fluids spilled from her since she started talking. She was looking with clear, unwavering eyes.

"Blood is coming out you know. Moreover, it's coming out from your head."

"This is just sweat!"

"There's a sweat with such Iron smell?"

"Errr, well, errr..... It's a sweat!"

"I got it already, so please come down a bit."

"Yes!"

"....."

Why did this happen? I'm dead tired after getting blown off all of a sudden.

After the scolding, there's a need to fix the roof tiles... oh I've had enough already. I would be a demon if I let a girl with such dangerous circumstances do it.

I took out a handkerchief from my pocket.

"Here, use this. Hold it down on the head."

"Eeh.....But."

"Also, while I repair the tiles here, please go and rest somewhere for a bit."

"No, I will also help out!"

"In such condition, rather than help, you'll be a hindrance. Please go and rest." I clearly declared it.

"But——"

"You. Are. A. Hindrance."

".....Okay."

After that, she sat at on the rooftop and held down the handkerchief on her head while feeling despondent like an abandoned cat. Although she was looking lively, it was unreasonable to let her do it, after all, as soon as she sat down, she lost her strength.

Let's put her aside for now. That degree of injury won't cause death.

Now, let's do something about this disastrous scene—I charged magical power in my hands. In a moment, along with the faint light, a long staff appeared in my hand.

This is a special privilege of magicians. Each of us — Magicians, can take out various Magic Tools like a broom or staff with the use



of —Magic.

Putting magic power in my staff, I started to invoke Magic.

Time Reversal Magic.

As its name implies, it's a Magic to reverse the time flow, repairing the broken things with it and healing injuries, however, it's a Magic that requires a slightly high skill. But if it's the Witches of this country, then probably all of them can do it. But it might've been difficult for the collapsed Mage behind me.

After getting showered with Magic, the tiles started moving. The broken tiles started connecting one by one, and just like a pieces of puzzle, they returned to their original state.

Then the fragments disappeared, and the traces of breaking also completely disappeared from sight, and at that point, I stopped releasing the magic and looked back. Next is the girl's turn.

"Well then, you are next."

"Umm, Err....."

After approaching the nervous girl who raised her body while holding her head, I started casting the Magic. Wrapped up in a tender light, her injuries along with her clothes started to heal up.

"Uwah....."

Amazing - I heard her mutter.

No, if one is a Witch, then it's normal to be able to do this much.

After confirming that she returned to her original appearance, I hurriedly went to pick up my broom that had fallen on the rooftop. I think it's a good plan to escape from here before it gets noisy.

"H-Hey!"

Partly ignoring her who was trying to say something else to me, I got on my broom.

"Thanks is enough. It's not good to disregard the surrounding

when flying on the broom you know?"

"Please wait, I want to somehow apologize——"

"No need. Because, I'm in a hurry. Good bye. Mage-san whose name I don't know."

Then I flew away with broom.

## PART 2

Speaking simply, a Mage is a person who can use Magic. Not everyone can use it, and in most cases, it is hereditary. My parents were also Mages.

Apprentice Witch ranks above the Mage and is one step below the Witch. Just like the name suggests, it's a title given only to women. For what reason is it like that? It's because, the ability to create magic is stronger in women than in men. Because of that, only women are placed above the rank of Mage.

There's just one way to become an Apprentice Witch: it's to pass the examination and receive a corsage that is a proof of Apprentice Witch. But this is not all. Having said that, there are many who give up in the middle of the examination because of receiving deadly injuries.

After becoming an Apprentice Witch, there awaits a training for the sake of becoming a person worthy to be called a Witch; under the genuine Witches, putting in a great effort day after day until you get recognized. That can happen in a day, or it could happen after a decade. It all depends on personal effort and the consideration of the Witch-sama that becomes your teacher.

If you are recognized as an official Witch, you will get a star brooch with your name inscribed at the bottom and the title of a Witch gifted from the teacher. In my case, it's "Witch of Ashes."

To end the long explanation: in short - I am among the top ranking beings in this country. In other words, I am a Witch.

When flying in the skies, people would look with envious gazes, or in the restaurant they would say something like "Witch-sama! You have a discount on every cuisine of this store! Please choose whatever you like!" and things like that... at least that was the expectation.

"Eh? Discount? There's nothing like that. Perhaps you have no money? Ojou-chan?"

"....."

Well, It's that, huh? If they treat every Witch with special treatment, it would turn out bad for the store.

Leaving the restaurant, I went towards the jewelry store. I wanted to sell the jewels that I gathered from the countries I previously visited. While thinking that I'd get a splendid price for them, I entered the merchant's store.

"Ah, these are complete imitations. I can't offer any price for them."

"That's absurd! Please look properly, once more!"

"It's the same no matter how much I look at it. What will you do? If you don't need it, should our store deal with it?"

".....For you to be saying something like that, you actually have ulterior motives to snatch it from me, isn't it?"

"Of course not, Ojou-chan. There's no way I would do that. So, what will you do?"

"Please return it."

I was very angry as I left the jewelry store.

But, well, even if that shopkeeper seemed a bit of a scoundrel, he didn't do anything to be despised by me right? That should be the case, right?

While feeling anxious, I went towards the inn. after all, It would get dark soon.

However.

"Aahn? This place is not for the brats like you. Now, scram."

.....Huuh?

Why?



Maybe this inn is for the rich adults only? Mhmm.

There's no choice. I'll choose another place.

And so, I descended with the broom towards the inn that had a cheap-looking worn-out signboard. This one should be all right I guess.

From the open window on the roof, I descended the ladder leading to the inside. But on the way down, I got carried away, and jumped. *thud*, a sound as if an iron ball was dropped reverberated. Of course, I'm not that heavy. How rude.

The place down there turned out to be the reception.

The woman sitting at the counter, after seeing me—

"Welcome....."

Became stiff.

She, as well as me.

Evenly-cut black hair. Average features that were similar to a boy in some respects. Sitting there, was the girl that ran into me (Physical Meaning) a few hours ago.

"....."

"....."

The one who broke the frozen atmosphere between us first was her.

"Hi-Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiii-! I-I-I'm s-s-sorry! I'm sorry! Is this a revenge? It's revenge isn't it! I'm sorry! Please spare me! Anything but my liiiiife!"

"No, um."

"Uwaaaaaah! I don't want to dieeeeeeeeeee!"

"Errrr....."

You don't have to be frightened that much.

"Please anything but my life....." - as she sobbed while rubbing her head on the counter, I gently touched her shoulders.

"Heeeeeeeee-! You intend to start by tearing off my shoulderrrr! Noooooo-!"

"Please quiet down a bit." Ah, that came out wrong. "Umm, Are you alright? I just came here to stay for a day."

"Nooooo—oh, is that so. So that's what it was. Then, please fill out these forms~."

"....."

There are a lot of things I want to say, but I must endure. I don't want to cause more racket.

I accepted the blank forms from her and took the quill that was lying on the counter. There were simple things like number of people, amount of days and the name of the representative written on the entry form. Being a traveler, this form is already familiar to me.

As I glided the quill across the paper, she said with a very cheerful voice:

"I'm truly sorry for today. I started thinking in the middle of training and somehow ended up not managing to fly skillfully....."

"I see."

In short, she is clumsy with broom handling, eh?

"I wanted to properly thank you but you suddenly headed somewhere else—Ah, so your name is Elaina? I'm Saya." she said as she stared at my hand with a bright smile.

As I was writing, "Just thanks is enough. Besides, it's common to get someone caught up when practicing magic." I said.

Come to think of it, I once got scolded by parents when I was trying to light a candle and set the house on fire. Ahh, so nostalgic.

"But don't you want anything from me? It will be terrible if I don't do anything after getting you in such trouble and even making you heal my injuries."

"It's nothing much though....."

"There must be something! Please! Elaina-san!"

I shook my head as she was trying to show her gratitude. It's quite an odd scene.

Well, there's nothing in particular that I want, but there's no need to refuse it unreasonably like that either. I thought a bit as I kept writing.

"Hmm.....Is that so, then——"

*Can I get a lodging discount?*

Is what I wanted to say, but I stopped.

An entry on the form caught my eye. Special discount for Witch-samas(Half per night) - was written there.

Hohou. Look what we have here.

"Ah, that, that's a reduction not covered by those who are Witch-samas. Other Magicians must circle the one on the general prices." She declared while knitting her brows.

"I see"

I circled the Witch-sama exclusive discount (half price).

"Eeh? Eh, umm....., uhh—?"

What's with that strange reaction? So rude.

"It's because I'm a Witch."

"But that's. You are joking..... Ah, no, I caused you trouble after all....Yes! Then, you should get the discount!" She clapped her hands as she declared that. Because the conversation drifted to a delicate thing, or perhaps because I remembered this strange uncomfortable feeling, I shook my head.

"No no no no, that's not it. It's because I'm a Witch. That's why I have this attire."

"Eeeh—?" She uttered. Then pointed at my chest.

"But, there's no brooch of a Witch-sama."

"Eh?"

I dropped my gaze to my chest.

The brooch that was supposed to be there has vanished.



## PART 3

The brooch of a Witch, so to speak, are their identification documents. Without it, I'm just an ordinary traveler who can use magic.

That's why I was treated like a child in the inn from a while ago. I see, I see.

More importantly, why didn't I notice it till now. Although the Witches are not rare, if I thought about it a bit more, I should've noticed faster. Am I an idiot? I'm an idiot right? I should just die.

As I cursed at myself, I immediately left and went to search for it....However.

".....It's nowhere."

It wasn't seen anywhere.

I searched around where I clashed with Saya-san, but it was already dark outside, and the object in question was a tiny brooch that could fit in-hand. It wasn't something you could find by walking around for a bit.

".....Uhh."

After moving in zig-zags on the rooftops while even checking the cracks, I descended towards the ground and started searching around the houses.

But, just like before, I couldn't find it. I want to cry.

"It's no good—! Elaina-san, it's not here either—!"

From above the rooftops, quite a loud voice came down and reverberated throughout the alley. Looking up, there was a figure of Saya-san illuminated by the moonlight.

Immediately after I noticed that the brooch was missing, she said "I'm the one responsible for it, let's go together!" and after insisting

on it, we came to look for it together.

I somehow entrusted the side of the merchant's home to another person.

As I walked down, she was in charge of searching above. There was a possibility of me overlooking it.

However, it seems that the outcome was the same.

I floated up to the roof with broom.

"Not finding it after all this searching means that there is a potential that someone picked it up....."

I leaked a sigh without thinking.

"I think it might be because it's getting dark. Wouldn't it be better to search here once more tomorrow morning?"

As I dropped my shoulders, she called out to me with a cheerful voice. I'm a bit grateful.

"Let's do that....."

As I meekly nodded towards her, I decided to return back.

I'm flying on a broom. Floating unsteadily, like a magician with clumsy broom handling skills. Yeah, if someone was flying nearby, I might have crashed into them.

That brooch is something I obtained after a lot of trouble, and it also contained the memories of me and my teacher. The shock from losing it is unimaginable.

If it was the time when I became a Witch, I would've immediately noticed it after losing it.

But now, because I carried it for two years, it became a normal thing that I had on me.

".....Haah."

Anyhow, I feel down.

After that, I returned to the inn and ate a meal in a half-fainted condition, took the key from Saya-san and entered the room. However, remembering that I haven't taken a bath, I quickly went towards the large public bath.

Absentmindedly I immersed myself in hot water. Ahh, either way, I can't think of any other place where it could've dropped except where I crashed into Saya-san... There's no other explanation... It's such a mystery... . . . thoughts like that passed through my head for nearly one hour. Remaining in the bath (Just me) until feeling dizzy, I dragged myself out the after almost melting in the water.

Then.

"Ah, hello—"

After returning to my room, there was a figure of Saya-san for some reason.

I closed the door.

Taking a step back, I confirmed the room number. Hmm, It definitely matches the number written on the key. Strange.

Maybe I imagined it?

I opened the door once more.

"Ah, Hello—"

It would've been good if it was a bad dream, but there actually was the figure of Saya-san in my room. She was happily waving her hand from above the wooden bed.

".....Why are you in my room?" - I asked as I closed the door with my hands behind my back.

"I thought I'd talk to Elaina-san for a bit, so I was waiting."

"But it should've been locked."

"Fufu, I'm working at this inn you know?"

Saying that, she proudly showed off the ring with a bundle of keys

on it.

Staying silent, I walked towards her,

"....."

And pinched her cheeks with both hands.

"I-ish hurts! Ish hurts!"

"Going in other's rooms as you please, what's the big idea. Ah?"

*Guriguriguriguri.*

"They will be shorn! my sheeks will shear off!" - *They will be torn, my cheeks will tear off!* Is what she was trying to say.

"Ah? What was that? I didn't hear it."

"Awawawawah....."

After I got tired from stretching and playing with her soft cheeks, I decided to release her. As she covered her slightly reddened cheeks with both hands, "How terrible....." She said, but which one of us is terrible I wonder.

"So, what business do you have? Since you sneaked in my room, you must've had some kind of business with me, right?"

Saya-san started speaking as she stroked her cheeks.

"Elaina-san, you really are a Witch right?"

"Yes. I guess." I consented to answer. "Brooch is missing, but I really am a Witch."

"Then, that means you successfully passed the Apprentice Witch examination, right?"

"That's right."

I still remember the disappointment from easily passing it.

After Saya-san stared at me for some time, she suddenly lied down and folded her legs on the bed, and then touched the bottom of bed's headboard with both hands.



"Please! Somehow, please teach me the secrets of examination!"

".....Umm, What's with that posture?"

"This is a traditional prostration handed down in my hometown! It's a killer technique for apologizing towards others."

It's quite a strange culture..... Apologizing towards someone was that great in her hometown? However, the sincerity is clearly seen.

Somehow, I felt.....chills, or perhaps I should say, some kind of mysterious sensation. I held back the urge to trample on her saying "Aah? Is that the attitude you should have when requesting something from someone, aah?" and kneeled down.

"Um, for now, please raise your head."

"Alright!" She suddenly raised her head.

"You don't have to do it that fast." I added. "But first, won't you explain your circumstances?"

Let's talk after that.

As she sat on the bed once more, I took a cheap-looking chair from the desk and sat at the opposite side. Saya-san's black hair jolted as she weakly shook her head, and—

"Err....." she shyly opened her mouth.

"I have a little sister. A very cute little sister, but..."

"Haa....."

That was a very strange way of introduction, but whatever, let's hear it.

"We are from the eastern country. Me and my little sister came from a far away to this country to become Apprentice Witches—Because there's no organization that performs examinations in our country. So as we worked at this inn to earn money, we have been living here for years to take the examination, however....."

"But both of you are still mages, right?"

At that, she cast down her eyes and slowly shook her head.

"Last time, only my little sister passed the examination. So only she returned back."

".....mhm."

I see, I see. Somehow, I feel I can see what happened.

In short:

"Since you were beaten to a punch by that cute little sister, you asked the Witch you just met for help. That's the case, right?"

"Well.....It's something like that." Saya-san muttered as she scratched her cheek embarrassed.

"When is the next exam?"

"It's in one week.....There's no time anymore....."

Well, the Apprentice Witch examination can be taken any number of times so I think there's no need to rush, but. . .

You want to meet your little sister that much, huh?

"....." After staying silent, I declared "If it's until I find my brooch, then it's fine."

In any case, I can't leave the country until I find my brooch, so I think it would be fine to do it in the meantime and I might even get to stay at the inn free of charge.

## PART 4

To achieve the rank of Apprentice Witch, you need to pass the written examination first and then pass the magic examination.

The written examination, bluntly speaking, is the easiest thing if you fill your head with things like history and magic theories, but with the magic examination, that won't help with anything. If your skill is lacking, you have to redo it many times.

Magic examination mainly looks at the ability to fly with brooms and operate Magic, and with each examination, only one person can pass. That will also be unchanged in the exam that's held in one week. Flying unstoppably with broom, at the same time obliterating opponents while receiving deadly attacks, and at the end, only the winner passes, becoming an Apprentice Witch.

The ugly part of the contest, is truly a cruel thing. It feels like it plainly displays the ugliest parts of humans.

I don't want to go through it a second time.

"Let's speak frankly. Saya-san. With your current power, the probability to win against other contestants in a proper fight is endlessly close to zero."

The next morning after I made a promise with her.

I spoke to her while sitting on the broom, "However, that doesn't mean that it's absolutely impossible to win against them. Please relax."

"W-What should we do!" Being lively despite the morning, she was looking with shining eyes. Like a sun that awoke just a little while ago.

I drew my broom towards her who was squatting on top of the roof tiles.

"For starters, you should learn to operate the broom at my, or even above my level."

"Eeh— That's a bit too hard....." She made a bitter face as she said it.

Just what is hard? What a spoiled child.

"There's no other method to survive the magic examination. Or rather, the current you will end up falling off the broom right after the examination begins. Better avoid that at least."

"Uggh....."

It feels like that.

For start, I decided to train her in the fundamental magic skills. In the end, just as I imagined, she's unskilled to the point that she can't even fly normally (To the point that you might hesitate calling her a magician), so it's very troublesome.

Ahh, so this is the feeling of mothers teaching their children how to fly, earnestly teaching from morning to evening as long as time allows it. As children point at us while making fun along with sneering adults, we are putting effort in this special training.

Of course, we didn't forget about searching for the brooch. She is slowly improving her results but on the contrary we aren't making any progress with the other thing.

My brooch, just where did it go? Seriously.

"Next is the rotation. Shift your body weight and bend skillfully."

"Yes!"

"Next is rapid braking and rapid takeoff. After forcefully stopping the broom with your entire your body, dash out with the feel as if you're kicking the air."

"Yes!"

"Next is aerial separation. Let go of broom in the air and then

summon it with Magic. If it gets dangerous then I'll come to save you, so fly with a peace of mind."

"Yes!"

"Next is——" and so on.

Just like that, in the blink of an eye, Saya-san got to the point of using the broom close to my level. To be asked how many days it took to reach this point, the answer would be 2 days.

This terrific growth of Saya-san raised some questions. What in the world was she doing until now. Or is it simply because my way of teaching is splendid, I wonder?

When I asked, "Because I was self-training until now." She answered, while looking embarrassed. What the hell.

And now, the fourth day of staying in this country—Third day of teaching.

On the contrary to the usual unsuccessful search for the brooch (just information gathering), Saya-san's special training was refreshingly favorable.

It seemed she could still reach even higher.

"Next, let's memorize the offensive Magic—How about Wind Magic?"

"Wind Magic?"

To her who was standing on top of the roof that was burned reddish brown and quizzically bending her head, I swiftly nodded and said. "Yes, Wind. By manipulating the air currents, it can hinder the other participants."

This actually was a dirty technique on my Magic examination. I still remember the effects of manipulating the air currents, like the people who lost balance and fell down, and people who staggered and collided with buildings.

Wind manipulation is easy to handle, and can become a powerful

weapon. Because of the time left, she must memorize it by all means.

"Then, please hit that bottle on the opposite side with the wind."

I pointed at the bottle that was put on rooftop opposite from us. From here, it's just a one house distance, so it shouldn't be hard at all.

"Imagine gathering the air and strike with it, and it will work out.— something like this"

I swung the staff.

In a moment, the bottle grew hazy from the wind, and then its top shook with rattling sound.

It didn't fall right? Was it a failure? Saya-san turned around with the face that seemed to ask that, but that was done on purpose. It really was, you know?

"Well then, go ahead and try it."

".....L-like this?"

With a *whoosh*, Saya-san swung the staff. Since Wind Magic itself is a Magic that is taught at the beginning, she was able to call it forth. But, the wind that she summoned passed by the bottle's top.

Regrettable.

"The way you hold the staff is wrong. And also the way of directing. Wind Magic is a very delicate thing, so swinging it too strongly will not do the trick."

"Err, then, how about this?"

*Whoosh*. The wind passed by.

It didn't change at all.

"Wrong. Like this."

I swung the staff and the bottle shook with a clatter. After noticing the reason I didn't throw the bottle down, "Wow!" - Saya-san leaked

out a voice.

And, she once again grasped her tender staff.

"Ei!"

This time she completely imitated what I did, but it was too weak. Only a gentle breeze blew.

.....It didn't go smoothly.

"Wrong. Like this."

"Like this?"

It missed.

"That's completely wrong. Like this."

"H-how about this!"

The wind didn't even graze.

"Totally no good at all. It's like this, this."

"Is it something like this!"

Totally hopeless. Totally. No response at all.

Let's use the strong measures. Getting behind her back, I seized it with both hands. Saya-san's shoulders shook instantly, and I whispered close to her ear.

"Are you okay? Right now I will launch Magic through your staff. Please learn with your body."

"W-with my body?"

"Yes. With your body."

I nodded to her whose ears were bright red for some reason.

"Then, here I go——"

And.

That kind of thing. We continuously trained till dusk on our third day. Instead of saying that she mastered the Wind Magic, it ended



up totally hopeless.

Rather, after I showed it to her from behind, it seemed like it got even worse.....?

Why did it happen? I don't Understand.

I can't always supervise Saya-san constantly. When noon arrives, I also go separately. For the sake of searching for my brooch, I fly downtown and listen to stories of various people.

Speaking honestly, it's nothing but information gathering after information gathering.

Without saying, I can't even find any simple information and in the end everyone shakes their heads while saying "I don't know".

The progress appeared on the fourth day from the day I became Saya-san's teacher. In other words, on the fifth day since I stayed in this country.

"I saw it." Saying cheerfully was the oba-sama that looked skillful with Magic. A star-shaped brooch was seen on her chest. But, from many years of service, it was splendidly worn-out.

Ooh, this is expected (Just what is?).

"W-Where did you see it!"

As I snapped at her, *Hihhi* - she laughed with a voice truly fitting to a Witch.

"Now, where did I see it....."

"Please tell me! Beautiful oba-sama."

"Hihhi!"

Without hesitation, oba-sama displayed her hand to me.

".....What's up with that hand."

"How much are you willing to pay? Hm?"

Currently Oba-sama was quietly presenting her hand to me. Pay to

keep asking questions, is it?

.....So filthy. As one would expect from a Witch.

"....."

I quietly took a single gold coin from the purse and put it in Oba-sama's hand. And with that, oba-sama restarted like a wound up doll.

"The place I saw it——"

Oba-sama started talking. Vaguely, I myself also feel like I've known about it somehow.

The end of a loose tale was told easily like this.

## PART 5

Nighttime between fifth and sixth day since I arrived.

From the bed, I looked out the window at the suspended moon, but suddenly, the door opened. As glanced there, the girl there timidly looked back at me.

She—Saya-san.

"Umm, Elaina-san"

"What is it?"

"I-is it alright to sleep together?"

I dropped my gaze at the bed.

"Isn't it small?"

"We are a cheap hotel so sorry about that."

Ah, no, I didn't mean that by it. This is a one person room. And only one person is supposed to sleep on this bed as well.

"Well, If you don't mind the narrow feel, then I don't really mind."

"Yay!"

Saya-san entered inside and roughly closed the door, then crawled in the bed.

Sweet fragrance of someone who just got out of the bath drifted in the air. Although we used the same shampoo since this is an inn, it differed from my fragrance quite a bit. Holding her hair and bringing my nose close to it, different from my hair, it had the fragrance of a lovely maiden. Why is it that only she has such a nice fragrance?

Well, it's fine.

I'll also lie down.

I lied down, facing to the side of the moon and covered myself with a bed sheet. I immediately noticed the presence behind me.

"Isn't it bright to face towards the moon while sleeping?"

"Just a bit." I turned around.

And at that moment, our eyes met.

".....Wasn't that a contradiction of what you just said?"

"It was not too bright to me."

She smiled faintly. Somehow that smile illuminated by the moonlight looked as if it would be broken from a touch.

"Good work for today. It's a great improvement compared to the beginning. To the point that you won't be needing my help anymore."

"Eeh, it's nothing like that. After all, there are many more things I want to be taught by Elaina-san."

".....I am a traveler. I will leave this country shortly."

"But we will be together all the time before then."

After some stirring under the futon, something cold touched my hands. It was Saya-san grasping my hand.

She looked straightly at me and started talking.

"Please teach me many more things."

"....."

The moonlight wavered inside her eyes.

An innocent girl like her was truly looking up to a person like me. However, I have to choose what is best for me from now on—even if it is something cruel for her.

This bitter feeling in my chest, is it from the guilt I wonder? Or is it because of the disappointment? I believe it's the former.

"This is an unreasonable discussion, Saya-san."

I declared.

Then, as I pushed her hands off mine, I said:

"Won't you return my brooch?"

## PART 6

The disappearance of my brooch that seemed so complicated at a glance, in truth, was something really simple.

"Isn't the girl you collided with responsible for it? After you hurriedly flew away, she picked it up."

Oba-sama said as she was brightly glancing at the gold coin. That was something I also thought about. If I couldn't find it all from all these searching, then probably someone picked it up.

From the start I had an uncomfortable feeling.

Saya-san.

You were unskilled in operating the broom to the point that I wondered about whether you were flying poorly on purpose.

Given that the lowest requirement to enter this country was to be able to fly properly with broom.

At first I thought Saya-san might be a native of this country, but then I heard her story saying she was a magician who expressly came here from the eastern country... And with that, it would be even strange being unable to fly on broom. So—.

So, honestly. I...

I was suspicious about you from the very beginning. And, I kept waiting. For you to return the brooch to me.

"But while hiding it in your hands, you didn't hand it over to me. On the contrary, you ended up talking about your wish of always staying together."

This much is already a limit—thinking that, I started talking.

Sitting on the bed with her head hanged down, I wonder what kind of expression is she making? She didn't scream like she did at first when I touched her shoulders. Sorry, but, I'm not a kind person

to that extent.

I just continued waiting for her. For the girl hanging her head to avoid the moonlight.

I wonder how long has passed since then? One minute? Ten minutes? It might even be just 10 seconds.

".....Why?"

Small voice, that was barely audible.

"What is it?"

"Why didn't you press me a question?" - This time, it was clearly heard.

"First reason is because I didn't have a positive proof. Even if I said "You are the culprit!", If you feigned ignorance, then it would've ended there."

"....."

"And also because I believed that you would return it to me at one point. To me, Saya-san didn't look like a bad person at all."

Just like a child spoiled by the mother.

In my eyes, she was reflected as an innocent cheerful girl.

"That's why, I was constantly waiting."

I told her.

With that, she finally lifted her face. Her pretty face was ruined from the wrinkles of tears. Saya-san wiped her eyes, and along with sobbing:

"I was lonely."

"I'm not your little sister."

"I know. I know that, but.....I-I wanted us to be together."

It was a voice that seemed like it would disappear anytime now. Was that towards her sister? Or, was it towards me?



After meeting Saya-san by chance, what do I even know about her? It would be same as not knowing anything, but I somehow understood what kind of person she was.

A hopeless elder sister who was always spoiling her cute younger sister. Surely, that's who she was.

But she couldn't endure going with her little sister.

"Loneliness felt bad, bad, and frightening, that's why I——"

"Ei!"

I flicked her forehead. With *clink!*, a rough sound reverberated.

"That is not a reason."

Feeling bad from being alone, you rely on someone. From the unpleasantness of the ridiculing loneliness, she desperately searched for someone who would get along with her. Feeling scared from the solitude, she frantically ran from place to place.

Honestly, I think it's a very detestable behavior.

"So what if you are alone? And what if you feel lonely? If you are afraid of them, then you won't become a Witch Apprentice? Truly, no matter what you accomplish, a person will always be lonely. It's no good if you are not alone. If you start getting along with others, then that's the end."

I wonder if her little sister said the same to her when leaving. I won't know that truth.

".....But"

"Aaahhhhhh. I don't want to hear it. Your sorry excuse won't reach my ears!"

I covered my ears with both hands and started shaking me head. Making the shaking sounds. I swung my hair with a force that it hit her face.

Ah, I got a little irritated.

"Surely, fighting alone is painful. It's scary. I can understand that. That's why——"

Saying that, I took out a tricorne with Magic. It was really similar to the one I use.

I put it on her head.

"That's why, take this. In order to be alright, please take this part of me and carry it with you."

Saya-san tightly grasped the visor of the hat and:

"But, to take something that's Elaina-san's....."

"Ah, It's fine. That's a spare one."

I showed her another hat I took out with Magic. It was a hat really similar to mine.

"With this, we are the same. From now on, you will be alone. But won't be alone at the same time. Me and your little sister as well, we will always be watching over you."

That's why, return the brooch to me—I said in order to persuade her.

While covering her head with the hat, and holding it very, very tightly as her shoulders trembled, she quietly nodded.

That form looked so empty and frail.

I embraced her slim shoulders.



That day.

We spent our final night together. After she stopped crying and calmed down, I instructed her about ways to pass the Magic examination, then heard stories about her and her little sister's country, as well as telling my own tales from journeying, and other various things.

Ah, speaking of which, Saya-san seems to be a splendid magician. Well, I knew about it. But I wonder why is it that only at the time of using the Wind Magic, she started to get worse in it? No matter how much I asked about that, she just turned bright red and didn't answer. What the hell?

In the end, we fell asleep after the sun started rising. It was a long, long night.

But, it became a precious memory.

## PART 7

I wonder how long has it been since I left the Country of Magicians.

Should be about six months.

After I met her, and after she returned the brooch, half-year has passed already it seems—Hah, the thing called time flow is a very fast thing. Really.

I already drifted so far that I'd say "Eh? Country of Magicians? Where's that?" if asked.

What reminded me of that person I met in that country, was her name that I saw when I casually entered a bookstore.

「List of people who recently passed the Apprentice Witch exam」

It was the bundle of cheap-looking papers that was a monthly newspaper of the mysterious organization called the Unified Magic Organization, which held the ceremonies of Apprentice Witch promotion exams worldwide. Its cover was decorated with the results of the promotional examination results, and with the comments of the successful participants.

And her name was also there.

"Hey! Look at you standing and browsing it." - The newspaper was confiscated by the shopkeeper-san that came out from the store.

".....Aah—"

I wanted to keep reading it.

"If you want to read it, then buy it."

"How much is it?"

"One copper coin."

I paid.

Then.

Taking the newspaper in hand, I came back to the inn while humming, then took the chair near the window and continued reading.

Written there was her everyday troubles and her aspiration towards the future.

About her coming to the Country of Magicians few years ago along with her sister. About her sister easily passing the Apprentice Witch exam and returning home. About the meeting with a certain traveler, receiving a beautiful hat and a courage to fight alone from her. About attempting the test several times after meeting that traveler but ending up failing. Yet, continuing with great effort without giving up, and finally becoming an Apprentice Witch. About planning to return to hometown from now on, and starting training in order to become a Witch.

I unintentionally loosened my face.

Her drawn-out story came to a finish with these few words.

"When I return to the hometown and become an adult, I will go to meet that traveler I love so much."

Dropping the newspaper on the desk, I looked up at the sky. Thoroughly clear light blue sky that kept continuing far across the distance without end.

I wonder if she's there, on the opposite side.

"I'll wait patiently as I continue my journey—Saya-san."

## CHAPTER 2

# SHE WHO IS AS LOVELY AS A FLOWER



## PART 1

It was the middle of a season that won't be called neither spring nor summer.

Cutting through the cool and dry atmosphere, I was flying in the broadleaf forest. This forest seems to be quite vast, as I can't see the end no matter how much time passes.

In order to avoid the trees that block the path on the very narrow road, I shift my broom left and right while noisily rubbing against branches.

After that, I saw the sky. This forest was so full of trees that I just merely saw something dazzling at the opposite side of the greenery.

".....Oops."

While looking up, my tricorne was swept away by a tree's branch.

After stopping, turning back, and recovering it, I once again started my advance.

If it's so difficult to fly in this forest, it would've been better to fly above it—But unfortunately, it's too late now.

I already came this far, and turning back would take too much time. If I tried to forcefully fly up from here, then I have a feeling that this time, my tricorne won't be the only thing that ends up being damaged.

I feel like I've fallen into a somewhat difficult situation.

Whose fault is it you ask? Well, it's entirely my fault, so what?

While such complaints directed towards no one in particular drifted in my mind, I continued flying.

I don't know how long it was before the path finally opened up.

"Wow....."

I leaked my astonishment without thinking.

What I saw there was a garden of flowers.

I was flying above the garden.

There were red, blue and yellow flowers spread along the earth. All of them were vividly stretched out, facing the sun. The wind from the broom's movement was grazing my face and showering me with petals along with a refreshing fragrance.

Good fragrances that touched the bottom of my heart soared up along with the distinctly colorful flowers. Holding my hat not to be stolen by the wind, I lowered the speed of my broom.

There, in the middle of the forest, was another world.

I was completely captivated by that sight.

".....Oh."

Within the flowers—I saw the silhouette of a person mixed in within the dazzling colors.

Is this person caring for this flower garden? I pointed my broom towards them.

"Um, excuse me."

As I called out from above the broom, that person turned their head while sitting. It was a cute girl the seemed to be around my age.

"Ara, hello."

"Hello. Are you tending to this flower garden?"

She shook her head.

"No. I'm not the caretaker of this flower garden. I'm here simply because I love flowers."

"You are not a caretaker.....? Then, all these flowers bloomed here on their own?"

"Yes. That's how it is."

*Is that so?* I thought.

I thought something like a flower garden could only be made through human effort. Then again, the flowers were on earth before humans, so it's not like they won't exist without human interference.

But, how can such magnificent scenery exist by nature's power alone, without human assistance?

Amazing.

"Are you a Witch?"

Tilting her head, she asked as she gazed at my chest.

"Yes. I am traveling."

That's so amazing—Ah, that's right, in that case~ I have a favor to ask."

"If it's something in my power."

With that, she plucked some flowers, wrapped them with her jacket, and presented them to me.

It was a bouquet made on spot.

"If it's all right, I wanted you to deliver these flowers to the country that's up ahead from here."

"Is it fine to give it to anyone?"

I cocked my head in puzzlement as I accepted them.

"Anyone is fine. Handing them to people is considered a beautiful act and it's important."

In other words, she wants to spread the word about this flower garden.

I feel like I can understand her feelings to show this beautiful scenery to everyone.

"So in other words, you want me to be a publicist of this flower garden, eh?"

"You won't?"

"No, it's fine."

Rather, it would be my pleasure—As I replied, she looked relieved from the bottom of her heart, and answered "I'm glad." while showing a smile.

After that, we engaged in light conversation for a short while. About countries I visited up till now, and about flowers she liked the most. If I'm not mistaken, we talked about subjects like that.

Then, afterwards we spent a lot of time enjoying the moment: "Well then, I have to hurry now—I'll deliver the flowers to someone in the next country."

"Please do, traveler-san."

She smiled and waved her hand.

"....."

Suddenly, I got an uneasy feeling. "You are not going to leave this place?"

"That's right. There's nothing bad in being in this flower garden. Soon, the day will end from just playing with flowers. I become happy just from basking in the sunlight. Isn't this just lovely?"

She said it with a clear voice. While continuing to sit.

## PART 2

"Halt, little girl. Hey, I told you to stop, didn't I?"

After traveling for a few hours on my broom from that flower garden, I, who arrived at a certain country's gate, was greeted by the black clothed guard-san with a nervous tone.

Taking such an oppressive attitude towards a stranger, and what's more calling me a little girl. While there were no people that made a good impression on me until now and this should be a natural thing for me, against him my anger raised if only just a bit.

But, I didn't show it. I'm an adult after all.

"Traveler you say?"

"Yes. Can't you see by looking?"

"What's that bouquet?"

"It's nothing important."

"....."

"What is it?"

"Show that to me for a bit."

He rudely approached me and snatched the bouquet from my hands.

"Ah, hey!" As expected, I can't close my eyes to this. I quickly got down from broom and tried to take back the bouquet.

But, he shook off my hands and stared at the bouquet—As if trying to drill a hole in it. As if my resistance was insignificant to him.

To make it worse, "This....Could it possibly be that person's....." he ended up muttering something as his facial expression changed. I didn't get it.

.....This gate guard fellow.

"You, where did you get this."

"Why does it matter. Please return it."

"Per chance, isn't this picked up from the flower garden?"

"That's none of your business."

I am completely underestimated huh. What should I do? Should I turn him to ashes?—I took out my staff.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

It was at the moment I decided to throw him down with a gust and prepared my staff: a voice resounded from behind me. And it had another oppressive attitude.

Just what is this? Are there only arrogant fellows in this country? Haah? Getting angry, I turned around.

"That is a traveler-san's possession. Return it at once!"

There was a middle aged man—Clad in the same black cloth as the gate guard— He wasn't glaring at me but at the young guard.

As I turned around, that young guard was grasping the bouquet with an awkward face. "But, sensei, This..... This is....."

"I get it from looking. I'll handle it from here so get back."

"That's not it, This is—"

"Get back I said. Didn't you hear it? You should rest for a bit."

"....Tch." While smacking his lips, he bitterly glared at me and went away.

"Ah, please return the bouquet."

"....."

He came back with a weak expression on his face, and:

".....Here."

He pushed the flowers at me.

"Thank you."

He didn't reply back. And now, he went off somewhere. That gate guard felt irritated until the very end.

Let's leave this behind now.

After watching until he disappeared, that person who was called a senpai made a troubled face.

"Sorry, Witch-san. It's because his little sister went missing recently. He's been like that ever since. Please forgive him."

"I don't mind it."

Even though that's a lie.

"By the way, those flowers, I'm sorry but can you dispose of them here? It is prohibited to take them in the country."

"Prohibited to bring it? You mean these flowers?"

I didn't understand the meaning and intention.

I unconsciously embraced the flowers tightly.

"There is a poison in those flowers." He indifferently said it instead of unreasonably snatching them away. "Since you are a Witch they are harmless to you, but they contain magic power that makes the hearts of people who can't use magic go mad—I also don't understand the details, but it's something like that."

".....Poison."

He nodded.

"Charmed by those flowers, people go to their original field and spend their whole life nourishing them. That's why taking them is prohibited."

"....."

"Is something wrong?"

".....No."

Supposing that there is a poison inside the flowers in my hands, then. . . could it be, I started thinking.

The girl that gave these flowers to me. Why didn't she try to stand up even once?—Why was she sitting in the flower garden? I kept wondering about it.

But, was that not trying to stand up, or being unable to stand up?

Maybe her lower body was not her's already?

.....

"Um, then the little sister of that guard from before."

"Yes. Ever since going to the garden of aforementioned flowers a few days ago, her whereabouts have been unknown."

He dropped down his gaze to the flower bouquet from before.

"Hey, Ojou-chan. Who are you planning to give them to? Perhaps—"

"No."

I interrupted his speech.

"I plucked these flowers for myself. The cloth they are wrapped in is my spare one."

That's why, I don't know about his little sister. I shamelessly declared.



## PART 3

After that, without doing any notable sightseeing, I went to the hotel and rented a room for one night's stay, then went took a bath and crawled in bed as if trying to disappear.

I started thinking while staring at the thin wood boards lined up at the ceiling.

About the flower garden.

And about the girl that was sitting there.

In the novel "Adventures of Nike" that I read long ago, there was a mention about a strange plant.

As I remember, the circumstances in that tale were that a mutated plant obtained a sense of self, or ego, from absorbing the magic power that it originally discharged and started acting violently—It was something like that.

In the first place, something like magic power exists everywhere in the world. Plants like trees and grass in particular, after getting bathed in sunlight, they radiate magic power. But, I don't understand why in the world it's like that.

Then, those who take in that magic power that's not originally in the human body, and are able to manipulate it at will are called Magicians.

So, Magic can be used at its strongest inside a forest that is overflowing with magic power. The place I trained at with my teacher in order to become a Witch was also in the forest.

I'd say we Magicians are also mutated existences like that plant in the "Adventures of Nike". After all, we are able to use something that is not usable by humans.

.....No, perhaps the ones who can't use Magic are the abnormal

ones.

I don't understand who is who. I had such casual discussion in my head, but thinking about it is useless. That discussion is the same as what came first, the chicken or the egg, it's absolutely useless to think about after all.

".....Fuah."

I yawned and rubbed my eyes. I can't sleep yet. It's okay. Don't sleep, don't sleep.

—The flower garden from before.

I fear that from that much magic power, the flower garden will evolve in a strange way. Similar to the flower in that novel that obtained self awareness.

If I think about it, that forest where the flower garden was was so dense with trees that you could barely see the sunlight if you looked above from there. The magic power that was created was befitting of it.

Under that much piled up magic power, it wouldn't be strange even if that flower garden turned into something different.

And the flower garden that spewed venom with its nectar that started tempting people—What in the world brought it forth?

"....."

What would become of people that were tempted by that flower garden?

That hazy feeling constantly clinged to my mind without leaving.

## PART 4

"Oya, Witch-san, are you leaving already?"

The next morning.

The one protecting the gate was the middle aged guard from yesterday. Seeming to remember me, he greeted me with a casual smile.

While making the same smiling face:

"Yes. This wasn't a too big country so one day was enough for me."

"It's a boring country isn't it?"

"No no. It was very enjoyable."

"Hahah. That was a funny joke."

Was I seen through?

"By the way, where is the young guard from yesterday?"

"Hn? He's taking a rest today. He left the country yesterday evening and hasn't returned since then. Why? Did you wanted to meet him?"

"So funny."

I don't want to meet him, so listen.

"Well he said he'd return by tonight, so if you want to meet him, then you should wait."

"No thank you."

"Hmm. Then, are you still going?"

"Yes. I would say that there is no need to hurry, but unless you leave this morning, you might have trouble reaching the next country before sunset."

Besides, there is a place I must go.

More than this country, my mind is at that place.

"Is that so? Well, take care."

"Alright. Thank you."

Thus, I left the country.

Then.

I faced towards the forest visible in the distance—Towards the place from yesterday and flew with my broom.

As I approached the trees that were sprouting from the forest, everything got dyed by the green in front of me.

The violent wind was blowing and twisting around, cooling down the hot, vast land. The clouds gathered in the sky, interrupting the sunrays.

The now ashen sky began to dye the scene with a leaden color.

Immediately after that, it started raining.

## PART 5

Passing through the trees that were pressed together, I was met again with the open space.

There was the flower garden.

Similar to the sky, they were quite dull compared to the vividness from yesterday.

"....."

Not just colors, even that appearance was giving off a slight uncomfortable feeling.

I followed the same path from yesterday in reverse, so this should not be another place, and, this uncomfortable feeling that can't be wiped of is a proof of it.

Descending with my broom, I met with the source of this uncomfortable feeling. Kusha! - With the sound that lacked elegance, the flowers underfoot felt like they were dead.

The flower garden with a pleasant fragrance. In front of it was a person's figure.

The true shape of this uncomfortable feeling was that: that human figure itself was what gave off this distress.

"....."

The girl who gave me the bouquet. And in front of that figure was a single man—His attire was different from yesterday but the person whose face I clearly remembered was sitting in the flower garden and looking at the girl with a smiling face.

It was the gate guard from yesterday.

"Hello."

"Ah, are you that traveler from yesterday? Greetings." He showed

a very light reaction.

"Is this your little sister?"

He nodded to my question.

"Yes. I finally found her. Who'd think she would be at such a place."

Making a kind face, he grasped her hand.

It looks strange the more you look. For some reason, I can't perceive the girl whose hand he's grasping as a human.

Green specks are visible on the skin, and the ivy is crawling throughout her body. She stagnantly looked towards the sky with blank eyes without blinking. Her mouth was opened wide and drool was spilling out.

Her lower body was even stranger. Her body below the hips was wrapped in giant red petals.

As if a human was growing from a giant flower. As if the human and a flower were forcibly connected. It was very bizarre looking.

He was looking with fascinated eyes towards such girl.

"So lovely. To become so pretty at such place."

"....."

"What is it?"

I shook my head.

"No, you look surprisingly different from yesterday so I was surprised."

"Aah, from yesterday? My bad, yesterday I was perplexed from not knowing my little sister's whereabouts.

Looking slightly down, I saw ivy that was coiled around his leg. Surely, he is unable to move just like her.

Rather than unable to move, it might be more like he has no

intention to move.

"....."

He wasn't paying my presence any mind either. If I didn't call out to him, he would turn towards her and continue to talk to her with emotionless eyes.

"Good grief, to be monopolizing such a lovely place."

"Ah, that's right. Hey, let's invite everyone from the country here together. If we show it to everyone, they'll surely be pleased."

"What's more, I want to show you to everyone now what you became so lovely."

"Hey, is that okay?"

"I see. Thank you."

Perhaps he was able to hear words that I was unable to hear. To me it only looked like a one-sided conversation, talking to his little sister about something, however.

The girl that I talked with yesterday couldn't even make facial expressions anymore. Nor could she really express anything.

It looked like both emotions, body and everything else was casted away somewhere by the flower garden.

She couldn't do anything other than be admired.

Just like a flower.

## PART 6

I was flying upon my broom above the grasslands.

Fortunately, it hasn't rained ever since I got on broom. I want to reach the next country before it starts raining, but what should I do?

".....Ara."

Under the ashen sky, I saw something wriggle towards my direction.

As it approached, I vaguely understood that its shape belonged to a human. Without dropping my speed, I passed side by side with that person.

"....."

I didn't really understand whether it was a man or a woman. Age is also unknown. I only understood that it was a human.

That person was walking towards somewhere. Going ahead, perhaps towards the country.

In those vague things, I only understood one thing clearly. There was just one thing I saw.

It was the important-looking thing that they were carrying in hands.

The flower bouquet.



## CHAPTER 3

# DURING THE JOURNEY – THE TALE OF A BRAUNY MAN IN SEARCH OF HIS YOUNGER SISTER

## PART 1

There's a shortcut ahead of here.

There was a signboard indicating that put up so I meekly followed it. The road was narrow—Or better yet, it wasn't something that would be called a road, but something more like an animal trail where I couldn't even use the broom. It was impossible to fly, so I continued advancing while bending around forcefully.

It couldn't be helped so I continued walking as I pushed the grass aside on the trackless road that didn't have any pavement.

From the grass that was wet with morning dew, the droplets scattered as they came in contact with me. The hem of my clothes was already wet and started to get heavier.

This is a shortcut when walking on foot, but if I could use my broom, I could easily take a detour. Damn it.

Speaking of which.

What kind of country would the next one be?

Since it has such uncivilized road leading to it, I think it's probably not very popular with trading.

In short, It might be a country as uncivilized as this forest. No, that is just my guess to the end.

.....Hmm, somehow, I lost the mood to keep going all of a sudden.

Should I return back? Well, that was just a joke.

As such complaints flowed in my head like the wind, I kept walking for some time. After continuing into the forest with the unchanging scenery, finally a change appeared.

".....Oh my."

A tree has fallen down. A several hundred years old giant tree was fallen down on its side.

And, not just one, but countless of them.

Uhh. So troublesome.

But, it's not like I can't continue ahead. I climbed above the fallen tree.

I walked with both hands spread out as if walking on a rope, then I caught sight of something black crawling in the forest's shadow.

Eh, bear?

## PART 2

Too bad. It was a human.

What's more, it was a giant with bulging muscles. So scary.

"Every tree in this forest was knocked down by my hands. What do you think, it's cool right?"

Humph - He took a pose to show off his muscles. Did he throw down the trees with just his muscles? I'm not interested in that, but anyway, enough about that.

"Are you perhaps from the country ahead?"

As he started posing for no reason, he said "That's right. I am native of that country. How did you know? Did you figure out from these muscles?"

"Eh? Don't tell me all guys in the country are brawny fellows like you?"

I took a step back.

"No. It's not like that. Rather, in that country, there's a muscle shortage."

"What are you trying to say by that?"

"Rather than that, these muscles, what do you think about them?"

I see, mutual understanding can't be reached.

I decided to go along with him.

"Ah—They are amazing muscles~. Can I touch them?"

"Go ahead, go ahead. Look!"

The giant man presented his bended arm to me.

I didn't know how it would feel so I poked it with a finger.

"Uwaa, amazing."

It was stiff like a rock.

"....."

"Um, why are you turning red?

".....I'm sorry. It's the first time a girl has touched me except my little sister....."

From that speech, it seems to okay to be touched by a little sister? Is that it? What's up with that shitty reasoning. Just perish.

Throwing aside my dark thoughts, I said.

"By the way, what are you doing in a place like this? Are you working?"

"No, I was in the middle of a training now."

Then, he started talking.

About his sister that was kidnapped by the strange people the other day. That because he was absent, he was unable to save her.

About hearing that his little sister's kidnappers were a brawny bunch according to the eye-witness. And in order to take down those brawny people, starting to train, in other words, chopping down the trees.

.....At the same time, working part-time as a lumberjack to earn the money.

".....In the end, isn't it just working?"

"What are you saying. I said it's not just for money. I have to accumulate much more muscles."

From that reputing with rough breezing, I got a slight uncomfortable feeling.

"What about the true objective of saving your little sister?"

"That's something I'll do someday. My muscles are not yet sufficient to take down my sister's brawny kidnappers."

No, you already transcended humans, so please go and save your little sister already.

.....If I said it, I think I would share the same fate as that fallen tree. Thinking so, I made an exaggerated nod.

Then he went on:

"But first, I need to defeat the bear—A boss of this forest. This is the first objective."

"Bear you say?....."

"Yes. That fellow is terrifying. And is able to catch fish barehanded in the river. I can't do that sort of thing."

"Haa....."

"Next would be a duel with that oddball at the backwoods of the forest that carries axe on shoulder. That weirdo can take down the bear that's boss of this forest in wrestling. It's a fearsome person."

"Haa....."

If it lost in wrestling, than that bear would no longer be the boss of this forest would it?

"Then after that—"

After that, I kept hearing about his plans for an hour, without even a word about his little sister. I wonder if he really plans to ever go save his little sister?

I wonder if his brain was polluted by muscles from overtraining himself? He seems to have forgotten about his real objective.

Rather, he put its priority far too low.

When will he remember about his true objective and go save his little sister I wonder?

Well, that story is something that has no relation to me.

CHAPTER 4

# FUNDRAISING

## PART 1

".....Yea, this is quite bad."

It's a small country without any characteristics. The reason I sighed was not because of the stale townscape. It was because of the disastrous contents of my purse.

After paying three silver coins to enter the country, there was a lonely huddle of just three copper and one silver coins there.

Moreover, sadly, from the many years of lying there, you would have trouble distinguishing the silver from the copper coin. It was also unknown whether I could use it or not.

The value of a copper coin, in general, was that it could buy you one bread.

A silver coin could let you stay for a night in a cheap inn, but if it's the gold coin, you could get yourself a high-class one with decorations.

Speaking about my current possibilities, it would be to enter a cheap-looking inn with a noisy door, eat just bread, and sleep wrapped up in a thin sheet while enduring the hunger.

Simply put, I'll die soon.

"....What should I do."

I'm troubled over money but I have to spend it. I kept walking while holding my growling stomach.

From the lined up pastry stalls on the street, the fruit and vegetables were shining like jewels in order to tempt the starving me.

Aah, I want to eat.....

I want to eat—

"Excuse me, a bread please."



Without noticing, I ended up standing in front of the stall that had a rich aroma of wheat drifting around it. The prices were not written there.

A lively granny, sitting at the opposite side of the bread looked at me and smiled.

"It's three coppers."

Whoops, that was impolite. I was mistaken.

It was a dirty old woman who was ripping money from the poor person.

"Eh? Excuse me. It seems I didn't hear well. Can you repeat it one more time please?"

"It's three coppers."

"I see, so three coppers for three breads right?"

"It's for one. Are you a half asleep or what?"

Are you yourself half asleep or what are you saying? Are you an idiot? How can you charge three copper coins for the crusty breads that seem to have been lying outside for a while.

Although I wanted to leave at least one complaint behind, unfortunately I didn't have enough energy to do so.

In the end, I left that place without saying anything completely exhausted.

Gulping air and saliva all together, I left the evil stall that tempted me behind.

As I advanced on the main street, I ended up on a plaza.

A giant fountain was stretching up to the sky. It was a totally ordinary sight that you can see anywhere. And on the bench at the side of the fountain, there was a couple merrily chattering not minding the surrounding stares, it was truly an ordinary scene.

.....

For some reason, I got irritated and thought about burning them to cinders, but casting the thought aside, I started walking towards the fountain.

Then, I drew the flowing water with both hands and started drinking. Cold water went down my throat and filled my body with the moisture it lacked.

"Hey look darling! That Witch is drinking the fountain water."

"It's true, such a shabby appearance! Hahahahaha!"

"....."

I loaded magic in my hand and silently swung the staff I took out.

A moment later.

Along with a plain sound, the bench got split in half.

"Kyaa! What happened to this bench?!"

"It probably got too jealous from our passionate love! Hahahahaha!"

"....."

Somehow my anger also completely vanished.

My feeling of hunger disappeared a little, so I put away my staff and started walking.

After all, I needed to find the inn to stay for tonight.

## PART 2

"Inn cost? It's thee silvers."

"For three nights? Sorry, but I plan to stay for one night only."

"No, it's three silvers for one night."

"....."

This place was already the sixth one. I was walking around in hope of finding a satisfying hotel, but why did this happen? No matter which inn it was, the price was three times that of a general market price.

In this crumbling inn that had a hole in a wall and no bath, the innkeeper asked three silvers for the night. You have to be kidding me.

I hanged my head down.

"Can't anything be done about it? I only have a silver and three coppers with me....."

I turned my purse inside out on top of the counter. A Lifeless sound reverberated.

"Aren't there just 4 coppers there?"

"Ah, that's a silver coin."

".....It's true. It's too unclean."

"Can't there be done anything?"

"There's no way" - The innkeeper uncle let out a sigh.

"Please understand, Ojou-chan. This is also a business."

"Is ripping the money from a poor person a business?"

"Business is usually such a thing."

"Fununununu....."

I can't deny it.

Somehow, it feels unreasonable to ask for the shelter in this inn.

I shifted my attention to the innkeeper while collecting the coins one by one.

"I have a question if you don't mind."

"What is it?"

"Aren't the prices in this country a little too high? The town scenery is also nothing extraordinary, and there doesn't seem to be things worth raising money for."

"Ah....."

"Since you are a traveler, you don't know, huh, Ojou-chan?" —  
The innkeeper said those words.

Looks like there are circumstances after all.

The innkeeper seemed to be worrying about the surroundings, so I lowered my voice.

"The foolish king that was crowned recently, started fabricating large quantity of coins."

"Fabricating? You mean making fake coins circulate in the market?"

The innkeeper nodded.

"Yes. And with the appearance of the money in the market, the value of coins was dropped. For you who are a traveler, the prices seem to be a bit high, but for the people living here, they are valid prices."

"Valid you say..... But, you are using fake coins right? Wouldn't you receive punishment for using them?"

"The one who circulated the fake currency was the king himself. There's no way that we would receive punishments."

I see.

I think I saw the true colors of this country. I don't understand what the king's objective was, but if he circulated the fake currency to liven up the country, then that would be befitting for a moron.

But there are no one who would oppose the use of fake currency in the country, huh?

"To us, it's not really important whether the coins we use are genuine or fake. If the money inside the country increases, then it would be fine even if the prices are raised, and whether they are fake or not, the citizens won't have a problem with it. The only ones troubled will be you travelers."

".....That's right. I think people coming from outside will have their hearts broken from such high prices."

Just like me.

The Innkeeper glanced behind me.

Looking back, there was another customer standing behind my back and holding three silver coins in hands— Seems like they plan to stop for the night here.

The prices that are three times higher than general, certainly do seem like they are valid prices for the people of this country.

"We should be done, Ojou-chan"

"Yes. Thank you very much for the important story."

I bowed and left the inn.

## PART 3

I decided to work in order to earn income for the inn charges.

I returned back all the way to the street where I couldn't buy the bread. Then I sat on the side of the street for a bit. Looking at the people passing by, they seemed to be shopping with completely carefree faces.

Their shamelessness knew no bounds even though they were aware of the fake currency.

"....."

Since I'm a traveler, my funds will hit the bottom sooner or later. It was not work in order to settle down here, but an essential thing to do.

That being said, I've had problems with fundraising many time until now. If money runs out, I won't even be able to enter the country after all.

Usually, I would save a person from merchant's shams and earn few coins from it.

But, I started to think.

But, since for this country, it's fine whether it's real or fake coins, then there are no disadvantages.

When I think that I would receive the threefold amount as well, then just like the people of these country, I also won't feel bad in the least about using fake coins.

"Hey, you."

I called out to the youth walking along the road with sullen face.

His shoulders flinched and he looked at me, "Eh, me?"

I nodded and beckoned him.

"You seem to have troubles right?"

"Umm, who are you?"

"Oh my, I was so rude. I forgot to introduce myself. I am a traveling fortuneteller."

As I shamelessly declared that, I pushed up my tricorne and looked at the sullen-faced youth.

He replied without erasing the dubious expression.

"Troubled you say..... Do I really appear so troubled?"

"Yes. To me, you seem to be full of troubles."

"Is that so....."

"That's right."

I made an exaggerated nod.

From personal experience, wavering in the middle of business leads to failure. The moment I wavered—The moment I opened up, they would start to hold suspicions towards me.

In short, the number one rule is to make an impression.

I began:

"You yourself can't fully understand what you are troubled over. —For example, it could be because you don't have confidence in your looks, or maybe something didn't go smoothly at work, or perhaps you feel anxious after being unable to meet your destined person no matter how much time passes—"

".....!"

His face twitched just for an instant, but I didn't miss that.

I see, so he is worried about not having a lover, huh? I see.

"You are feeling anxious about not having a lover—Am I wrong?"

".....Well. Probably."

He said that to me while averting his eyes.

"I shall offer you a divination—About the day your destined person would appear before your eyes."

I took out my staff and loaded magic power into it.

Poh - With a sweet sound, fire was produced.

".....Aah"

And immediately after being born, it was swept away by the wind and faded.

It seems the magic power was too weak.

Regretfully, I raised the staff that had smoke coming out even above. Truthfully speaking, I wanted to have a development where I tell fortune while looking at the flames, but that's already impossible.

After blowing off all steam from it with my breath, I put the staff away.

"I see, I understand."

"Eh? With just that?"

"Yes. The smoke divination just now was a method of divination where you look at the shape of the smoke and predict the fortune."

That's a lie though.

"I never heard of it."

"Even so, it's like that. After all, this fortune telling is a secret art that has been passed down in my family for generations. It's not possible for others to be aware of it."

I forcefully ended the talk in order to not let the lie be found, "By the way, about your destined person."

"Y-yes. What? When will I meet her?"

"Today it seems."

"Eh, Today? In other words, that means you are—"



"Tonight, your destined person will appear right before your eyes."

I feel like he was trying to say something ambiguous, but it's better to disregard it as nothing but nonsense.

Before he ended up saying another verbal slip, I opened my mouth.

"There should be a plaza with a fountain up ahead right? There should be a broken bench on it's side."

I took out something from the purse and started talking as I presented it to him.

"If you put this on your hand and stand near the bench, your destined person will show up before you without fail."

After he took it from my hands, he got puzzled.

".....This is? All I see is just a normal string."

"That is nothing like a normal string. That's a magical string that is loaded with my magic power. It holds the power to draw in the destiny."

Of course, I didn't do something like loading my magic in that string, and in the first place, even if I did, it wouldn't have power to pull in destiny.

Speaking of which, if I'm not mistaken, this is the string that I picked up near the stalls.

"If I have this string..... Then, the destined person...."

"That's right. You will surely meet her. Well then, it would be sufficient if you wait till night with a neat appearance. So that way you don't disappoint the destined person."

Somehow, the youth who was hesitating started to tightly grasp the string before long.

"I understand. I will wait near the bench while wearing this."

He tried to depart with a refreshed smile. But, I hurriedly stopped him.

"Customer, the combined price of the string and fortune is one gold coin."

I began saying magical words to the frowning youth. "Don't worry. If by chance you can't encounter the destined person, I will return all of it."

It was about one hour after the sullen faced youth left.

One woman passed in front of my eyes.

She was a plain woman with plain appearance and features. Her age was approximately same as mine. Her base features weren't bad, but her good points seemed to be killed by her unkempt hair and her attire looking as though it were just thrown together from her closet.

Just like that darkened silver coin.

Anyhow, I decided for that girl to be my next customer.

"Hey, you..... You are worried for being unable to find a lover right?"

I called out to her who was walking with her head down.

Her shoulders flinched and she turned towards me.

".....M-Me?"

"Yes. You."

"Umm, who are you?"

"Oh my, I was so rude. I forgot to introduce myself. I am a traveling fortuneteller."

As I shamelessly declared that, I pushed up my tricorne and looked at the her.

While shivering just like a herbivore under the gaze of a predator, she asked me timidly.

"H-how did you know?"

"I understood it. I am a fortuneteller after all—I saw everything about you starting from your troubles to your destined person."

"E-even the destined person? Is that truee!"

"Yes. I saw it clearly with these eyes."

Obviously, it was a lie.

"Then, when will my destined person appear?"

"It seems today."

"To-today.....?"

She who throbbed from the word "destined person" was also greatly shocked from such a sudden development. But I didn't panic. Because up to this point, everything was going according to my plans.

"There should be a plaza with a fountain up ahead right? There should be a broken bench on it's side."

Then, with extremely calm tone, I added.

"Tonight, a person wearing a string on his arm should appear there. He would be your destined person."

## PART 4

And so. Just like that.

While saying "For the improvement of fortune", I gave them a stone that I picked up nearby and arranged the fated meetings.

And the result of continuing such superb business for a few days: my purse is now crammed with lots of gold coins. If it's this much, then I can live next few month with enjoyment.

Oh no-no, I have to thank the king who fabricated the coins first.

Thanks to the fact that the prices in this country are high, the consumption of money just for staying is high, however in return, there are unusually high rewards in business so everyone is happily doing it.

In any case, money's value in this country is lower than other countries.

"—Yes, so, in other words, if you decorate your store with this 『Half Price』 signboard that's loaded with my magic power, the bread will start selling like hot cakes."

"Really? I'll do it without delay!"

"Is that so? Ah, the signboard cost and consultation fee is 3 gold coins."

"Is that for 3 signboards?"

"It's for one of them. Are you sleep talking or something?"

Coins in my purse have increased yet again.

I forced a signboard onto the old lady from the bakery who came after hearing the rumors, and with that, my work for today is done.

Joyous clinking sounds were heard from the purse that became completely full.

Well then, time to return to that worn-out inn. I stood up and lightly stretched, then started collecting the luggage.

"Wait, you."

It happened suddenly.

Someone grabbed my shoulder from behind—I got surprised and turned my head around.

There was a soldier standing there.

No, it seems soldiers.

About ten soldiers of similar appearance slowly spread out and enclosed me. They had spears in hand and guns on their backs. It was a little out of place situation.

"You are a traveling fortuneteller right?"

Man who stood before my eyes opened his mouth.

"No, you are mistaking me for someone."

"No use lying. We were watching your trades with customers from behind the scenes."

"....."

Sweat started to pour down my cheeks.

This is bad. This is bad, this is bad, this is really bad.

What should I do. Looks like someone complained about my scamming work—But, still, I haven't really cheated or anything. But, ahh, what to do..... I'm surrounded so I can't escape. I could probably escape if I use Magic, but want to avoid making enemy of the whole country....

"Please come with us," the man in front of me declared it indifferently, "The king wishes to meet with you."

It goes without saying that I didn't believe my ears.

After I walked through the street of no real character surrounded by knights, I arrived at the palace without any special features.

Aside from the high prices, there wasn't anything peculiar in this country.

In the biggest room of the royal palace, a single young man was sitting on a tall chair of the throne.

The young king sitting above the stairs looked down on me and uttered: "Are you the traveling fortuneteller? You look very young."

"King-sama is also very young. I was thinking king-sama would be older."

The soldiers sent cold glares at my words. No, I didn't say that with sarcasm at all. It's true.

King glanced at the soldiers and said, "That's enough, of all of you. Withdraw," and sent them off with hand motion.

After soldiers left the vast room and only two of us remained in it, the king started once again.

"There's a rumor that your predictions are very accurate, is that true?"

"Yes, well—Those who said that it's accurate are probably right"

"Are they effective only towards humans?"

"? What do you mean?"

"I want to hear whether it's effective on things in general."

He declared that in a completely calm tone—I don't understand what he's thinking at all. Does he believe in my abilities? Or is he suspicious of them? Or is it that he already saw through my lie?

I approached in a roundabout way.

"What object's future do you wish to see?"

"The future of this country" - the king immediately replied.

"Future of the country..... is it?"

That's right - he nodded with a humble expression, at that point I began to think.

Predicting the future of this country doesn't require something like fortunetelling. It's a simple thing.

No, in the first place, I don't have any powers for fortunetelling.

"Before I answer that question, there's one thing that I wish to ask you, king-sama."

"? What is it?"

I started by saying, "Please tell me the reason of spreading fake coins in this country."

After hearing that, he frowned and leaked a sigh "That's nonsense."

"Eh, are they genuine coins?"

I looked at the coins that were filling my purse.

If all of these are real ones, then I'm an absurdly rich person now. Yaay.

".....Indeed. What I spread were genuine, real coins—No, I'm not the one who spread them though."

"Was it by someone's instructions?"

Young King nodded.

"It was done by the right-hand man of the previous king. I have been crowned just recently, so I left all economic policies to him. It was the idea of that person to spread the newly made coins inside the country to stimulate the economy. Well, in the end it didn't go as planned."

"....."

I have a feeling that it going smoothly is out of the question though.....

"Because the money inside the country increased all at once, the talks about fake currency fabrication started spreading, but that's complete nonsense."

".....Isn't there a possibility that that adviser has lied to you?"

"There isn't. I secretly summoned a specialist in palace without him noticing and made him investigate, but all newly produced coins were genuine without a doubt."

That's why, the rumors saying I spread the fake coins within the country are nonsense—The king stood up as he said that.

He slowly came down from stairs and approached me.

"That adviser truly did well. Truthfully, I even think that he should have become a king instead of me. —However, that didn't come true because of the hereditary system. Before advancing the political measures, he would always come to my side with advices. If not for him, I would have been thrown down from the King's seat long ago."

"....."

He stood before me and made an unpleasant face.

"But, I just don't understand him lately—I don't think that the things he made me do are connected to prospering the future. I don't want to doubt him, but looking at the present situation, the economic state of this country is too grave. Although the rumors about fake coins appearing in the market aren't true, the travelers are growing distant because the prices are high. The diplomacy is also lost."

Hearing his troubles, there's only one thing that came to my mind.

This young king wants to have a peace of mind.

By looking at the future of the country, he wants to obtain a peace of mind. If the future of the country is peaceful. If the adviser didn't lie after all.



What an honest person—No, describing him by simple honesty might not be correct.

"That's why, I want you to show me the future of this country. Can you do it?" he declared.

My answer was already decided.

"It is possible."

He nodded with gleaming eyes, "Is that true!?"

After he forcefully grasped my hand, I withdrew my hand while stepping back and said.

"Yes. I do not say lies."

Telling lies like breathing is surely said about this.

"But before telling the future of the country, I have a condition."

"What is it."

I raised the index finger.

"First. Please let me stay here for a day. Telling the fortune of the country is very hard work. First, it's necessary to grasp the whole country from the royal palace that is located at its center."

"Yes. I understand. I will immediately make arrangements."

The young king made a big nod. I raised a middle finger next to the index.

Staying one night is just an additional thing. For the thing I will do after this doesn't require preparations for it to go smoothly even though I said so.

What is important is the next condition.

"And the second—"

## PART 5

After that, while thinking about my strategy, I've been lying on the bed for a while in the room King-sama gave me. Waiting for the time when I need to carry out my plan.

When the sun had finally sunk below the window and the outside was dyed by darkness, I finally opened my eyes.

It's about time it seems.

I took out my staff and hit my head with it's tip.

"Eii!"

With silly pop sound, I turned into a single small mouse.

I temporarily changed my form by applying Magic on myself. It's a tiresome thing and I didn't want to do it, but there's no other choice.

Taking a form that's easy to move in, I recalled the blueprint of the royal palace that young king showed me and dashed towards the desired location.

If I go through the corridor, I might end up slaughtered by passersby, so I decided to move by attic. I advanced briskly on the attic that was so dusty that it it couldn't be compared to the dazzling interior of the castle.

And, I arrived just above the room of the adviser.

As I looked down from the gap, I saw an adviser with his elbows on put on the writing desk. Opposite of him stood a single soldier. He had an appearance similar to the soldier that surrounded me today.

I guessed from the atmosphere that they weren't having a friendly chat.

"So, how is it father?" - Said the young man.

"How you ask?" The adviser replied while scratching his head, "It's certainly going favorably. Soon that king will fall."

"Soon you say, and when is that? Isn't that what you've been saying for a while?"

The young man raised an agitated voice.

That last voice seemed to be asking about something—But thinking about it with this small head, only one person that sounds like that comes to my mind.

Perhaps, the young man who is having a conversation with the adviser is that soldier from daytime who grasped my shoulder. It might be my misunderstanding, but.

"That king has summoned the traveling fortuneteller to the castle. Surely, it's for predicting the future of the country. Our plan might be revealed to the king."

The advisor laughed.

"There's no way that the youngster who adores me would do something like that right? Most likely, he wants to hear about his fortune in the near future."

"....."

"What's more, the fortunes told by that traveler are also suspicious. She might be a little scoundrel that makes money by tricking people."

Kuuh!

".....The fortuneteller is just a little girl."

"I want to see the person myself."

That's right. Everything is exactly like that. But I'm not a little girl. I'm a Witch you know? A Witch.

Perhaps he was tired to return the words, the young man just sighed and replied, "Keep the promise."

"Yeah, I will keep it. That's why you should also do your job properly. After all, your actions are essential in my plan."

".....I understand."

Saying that, the young man decided to leave the room.

The ceiling broke with loud tearing sounds, and the ashen-haired Witch holding the staff jumped down from there.

Who in the world was that? That's right, it was me.

".....Haa, haa, fuuh....."

Aah, what an awkward appearance.

The Magic wore off midway. This situation was familiar.

It seems that the ceiling where I was peeking from was too narrow for my body to fit. It broke the moment I returned to my original form.

Or maybe it was rotten from the long age?

At any rate, it wasn't because I was heavy. ....Probably.

"W-Who are you!"

While I was standing up and brushing off the dust stuck to my body, the adviser was alert with a rifle in hand. He was probably hiding it under the desk.

Thoroughly prepared.

"Nice to meet you."

I swung my staff.

In a moment, a flowers bloomed from the gun.

They were quite lovely flowers at that.

"You—! T-This!"

Because the flowers I made turned out to be so pretty, I completely forgot about the other person behind me.

But since turning around was troublesome—I tapped the floor with the staff and bestowed life to the scattered wood fragments.

The fragments turned into ivies.

And the ivies dashed towards them.

And it seized them both.

"You are the adviser of the king-sama right?"

The middle aged man whose limbs were restrained by the ivy looked at me. He directed eyes full of hatred and bewilderment towards me.

"Who are you!"

"Father, this is the traveling fortuneteller!" the young man replied from behind.

I frankly nodded, "That's how it is. I am the traveling fortuneteller."

adviser wriggled like a bagworm while unable to move.

".....What business do you have with me."

"Oh, you should know that yourself right?"

"....."

Silence.

I turned around. The man who brought me here at daytime was glaring at me.

"What do you intend to do!"

I answered.

"I intend to predict a peaceful future for this country."

## PART 6

After that, those two were seized by the guards that came after hearing the noise, and were made to spill everything in front of the king.

It seems that the father and son planned to seize the country.

And the coins that were spread inside the country turned out to be fake in the end. It seems that the expert who told the king that the coins were genuine was a dirty imposter who was bribed by that adviser.

In order to distort the hereditary system, he purposely made the country fall into crisis. He confessed that he put all the blame on the young king and planned to overthrow him. Probably after the advisor-san became a king, he planned to make his son succeed him.

But, it ended with a failure.

Right now, they are locked in prison, but I don't know what would happen to them from now on. It's not a question I should be concerned about.

Then after their questioning has ended, I was summoned to the throne and received the promised thing.

"Thank you very much"

I nodded as I confirmed the contents. Large quantity of old gold coins went inside my purse.

As a second condition for predicting the country's future, all earned gold coins were exchanged for the old ones. Fake ones were completely removed.

"Collect all fake coins that appeared within the country" The king weakly ordered. "The coins inside your purse are most likely fake

too."

"As I thought."

The promise to predict the country's future was still not fulfilled. The problem that the young king was worried about already disappeared, therefore there was no need to predict it anymore. I feel relieved that I stopped telling lies.

Although the future of the country was weighing on my mind a little, I'm a traveler so I have to depart from here at once.

What kind of road would this country follow from now on? That question is not something that someone could answer or predict its future. The same goes for me.

"But, it's regretful. To think that he kept lying to me."

I replied to the lamenting young king, "A liar is someone who looks composed all the time."

## CHAPTER 5

# DURING THE JOURNEY – THE TALE OF TWO MEN WITH AN UNDECIDED MATCH



## PART 1

As I flew above the gentle grasslands with my broom, the sounds of wind gently brushing the flowers reached my ears. The moderately warm sunlight and fresh wind was a pleasant combination, so much that I wanted to keep on flying at this place.

Whoosh, whoosh, the sound of the wind could be heard as I manipulated the broom, following the wind left and right - I started enjoying it just a bit.

But enjoying moments always end up being easily disrupted. This time was also not an exception, and I stopped after catching some voices in the wind.

"Aahn? What was that? Say that one more time you shitty big brother."

"Aahn? As I said, I was the one who was better you shitty younger brother."

This precious refreshing mood was ruined.

As I turned my head to confirm the source of the voices, I saw shapes of two men who were arguing about something.

The two wore colorful closes, and guessing from their previous conversation, they are brothers.

"Wrong, I'm(orecchi) better than you. I'm absolutely better."

"Wrong, It's decided that I'm(oresama) better. Because there doesn't exist a little brother who can surpass his older brother."

"Hahaa! That logic is too old. It's the antique way of thinking. Over the ages, there have appeared little brothers who grew as they witnessed the blunders of their older brothers. Little brothers who can avoid blunders in advance are the strongest."

"Hahaa! Such foolish talk. Isn't that the talk about good for nothing

old brothers? But I'm already a perfectly flawless human. If I had failures, just for argument's sake, those failures would be something too high for you to succeed with!"

Those two cursed for some reason and kept glaring while groaning like "Aah?" and "Wanna have a go?" towards each other.

By the way, what exactly is the antique way of thinking I wonder? Or what are the high level failures?

While I was puzzled about that, my eyes meet with one of the brothers (who was probably older one) who referred to himself as oresama.

He immediately declared with a loud voice.

"In that case, we should let that girl judge which one of us is the superior!"

The brother (probably younger) who referred to himself as orecchi nodded in agreement. "That's fine with me. Well, the one who wins would be me in the end anyway."

I have a very bad premonition about this.

"So, what are you two quarreling about anyway?"

I asked the two while sitting on the grasslands.

The two of them had similar facial features and hairstyles. Only difference between them was the color of the clothes. Older brother wore red while younger brother wore blue.

And then red and blue brothers said at the same time.

"Magic tricks!"

"Haa, magic tricks is it?"

"Magic tricks!"

"I got it already so no need to say it for the second time"

"Mag——"

"Hey didn't you hear what she said? This is why brats are...."

"Aahn? Don't get carried away just because you were born mere three years before me, you shitty brother."

"Exactly because you don't know the difference between three years is what makes you a brat, you brat."

"Even though there is three year difference, you can't even use magic tricks on the same level as me? Ah?"

"Won't the two of you quiet down for a bit?"

"Yes"

"Okay"

I made them shut up. They became silent. Good, it finally became quiet.

However, magic tricks huh..... Since I am a Witch, I'm too unfamiliar with magic tricks.

This is troublesome. Umumu.....

Talking to both of them at once would be troublesome so I'll talk to one at a time. I started talking towards the younger brother.

"Why magic tricks?"

"In your country, there's not even one magician. There's also the fact that it's a small country, but, for some religious reasons, it has a history of banning Magic."

"Mhmm"

I have a feeling that some serious talk is about to start.

The older brother continued the words of his younger brother. "But there's an instinct that attracts ones to prohibited things right? There are many young people like us who admire magicians."

"So the two of us started thinking. 『Eh? If we pretend to be magicians, wouldn't we make a sum?』 so we thought."

"After that, we performed as the 'Illusionists who are really close to the Magicians' on the way."

Ah, it really was a serious story, huh?

I cut into the story that those two were proudly talking about together.

"And, didn't anyone get angry?"

The one who answered was the one in blue — In other words, the younger brother.

"They got angry, and we got caught. But, it's not like we can use Magic. They are magic tricks. So, no matter how many times we were caught, we were immediately released."

"Such thing....."

That's like a treatment of a hero.

Also, they added "The government of our country is no good! They are incompetent!" at the end.....

"But, wouldn't the magic tricks end up being banned because of you two?"

It just a simple question.

"Ah. It was."

"And, we were exiled. Completely broke."

"Eh? You were exiled huh?"

They both nodded. They really act the same.

"The decision to exile us was decided one month ago."

"After that, in order to earn money, we ended up becoming traveling entertainers."

"I see, I see."

"However, before becoming the traveling entertainers, one problem popped up."

"Our team didn't have a name"

"Team name is it?"

"We decided to make the team name from our names, but you see, we started arguing about which one of our names should be first"

"Then, we decided that whoever was better at magic tricks would be the first one"

I see, so that's what it's about.

"By the way, what was the outcome?"

Onii-san was the one who answered.

"Currently it's 0 wins, 0 loses and 15 draws."

"The outcome isn't decided at all....."

"That's why we want you to decide the victor among us."

"I want for my draw to end today"

Two of them glared at each other while shouting things like "What you looking at?" and "Haah?"

Oh? Could it be that I have a serious responsibility?

## PART 2

The magic tricks of those two was truly a wonderful performance.

They did things like taking a bird out of nowhere, teleporting coins, finding the card I drew and so on. I got surprised and excited over and over.

Magic tricks are amazing.

But what was troublesome, was that the skills of those two were so great that they couldn't be distinguished. Certainly, I understand why the victor couldn't be decided from this contest.

"How was it? I was great right?" - said younger brother while putting on airs.

"No, my magic tricks were way better right? It's like that without a doubt" - Big brother also said exaggeratedly.

I looked at the two who kept glaring at each other at the same time, and declared.

"It seems it's a draw~"

Just that.

Both of their skills are amazing so there's no way for me to tell who's better — That's my stand on this.

Honestly, it would be just too troublesome to speak my mind.

I will let some other person conclude it.

I was ready in case they started raging from my answer, but as one would expect, because they already had 15 draws, they were unexpectedly calm.

".....Is that so. Well, It can't be helped. Deciding the team name is still ahead."

"Weeell, my name would be the one that ends up as first anyway"

"What what that?"

"What!"

"Please stop it both of you"

"Okay"

"Alright"

While they became silent, I took some distance.

"Well then. My role ends with this."

I am a traveler after all, so I need to reach the next country soon— saying so, I made a forced smile and began to depart.

But at that moment.

"Ah, hey. Wait a minute."

"Won't you pay the price?"

I was stopped by them.

Eh? Price?

"The magic tricks we just did has a price right?"

As I turned around, both of them started shrugging.

"It's should be quite pricey, right?"

"Seeing our tricks for free isn't really a good thing right? Right?"

"Right?"

Where did the two who were quarreling since a while ago go? Now they appeared to be quite in sync with each other.

I have some bad feeling.

"Wait, no one said anything about it costing money....."

"I don't remember saying it was free either," the younger brother started acting like a child.

"Wait a second. Let's confirm the situation. You asked me to watch over your contest of magic tricks— Then I acted as a judge of that

contest. Is this correct so far?"

"Yes. That's how it was."

Older brother nodded. Then, I continued.

"Right? Isn't that right? In that case, these magic tricks weren't for the business but for the sake of deciding your match right? Should there be a necessary for paying the money?"

"Don't say foolish things. Our magic tricks are always our matches. Right?"

"Right?"

.....These two.

They set me up. I had a feeling that I was being tricked since the beginning.

They lure travelers with their quarrels, then make them see their tricks and ask for money..... Probably, they repeated this kind of play for the past 15 times as well.

What shameless bunch.

".....By the way, how much is the price?"

I'm just making sure. There's no way I'd agree to their complaints.

"It's four silvers"

"It's 8 silvers all together"

"Ehh. So high"

One silver coin is needed to stay one night in the inn, so in other words, they are asking me to give up eight days worth money to them.

Such a thing.

"You saw the magic tricks of best traveling entertainers after all. Rather, that should be cheap right?" big brother declared.

Well, the skill of their magic tricks were most certainly high,



however.

"....."

I'm just unwilling, but certainly, their complaints aren't really wrong.

I who didn't agree would be in the wrong, but that's it.

.....

I don't wanna pay. I don't wanna pay the money for such useless thing—

Etc..

I kept thinking about such things over and over.

"Wait a second!"

I heard some voice, that sounded like it was asking about something.

As I looked ahead, there was a giant from a while ago standing there like a saviour.

Ohh, what a coincidence.

"Ah, hello"

Nodding hastily, he began to get embarrassed.

"It's been a while, Witch ojou-san"

"It's been a while. Brawny man."

It was the guy with cool muscles that I met few days ago. The brawny man.

Since I never heard his name when I met him last time, I reflexively called him a brawny man, but it looked like he started throbbing when he heard word about muscles: "Fufun, that's right. I am the brawny man"

He puffed his chest.

Uwaa, he looks like a fool.

With the sudden appearance of this mysterious brawny guy, those two swindlers were clearly trembling in fright.

"H-Hey..... Who is this guy"

"What? Could it be her boyfriend?"

"That's wrong"

I firmly declared.

A guy whose muscles reached up to his brain is a bit much.

He, without understanding the meaning behind my behavior—Or perhaps not even hearing it—turned toward the two and said with quite a bit of volume.

"By the way, you two! Doing things like tricking people to earn money, even if God allows it, I for sure won't. Prepare yourselves."

It became something that was too much for me in every sense of the word so I turned my face away.

".....Why did you turn away."

My actions were seen.

"No, it's nothing," I answered.

"By the way, why is brawny man here?"

"Ah. I was on my way to take down the legendary dragon as the country up ahead calls it. Then, I saw your figure as I was competing with the wind in a running contest—"

"What about Imouto-san?"

"Imouto?"

After a short silence, "Ah, Imouto..... Imouto, right. I was thinking of going on a search for her after I defeated the legendary dragon. Hahahaha!" - He started laughing in a visibly forced way.

He totally forgot about her, huh?

It seems his head was packed by nothing but muscles.

".....How should I say, Isn't this guy unrelated to our and her business?"

"Yeah. For sure. S-should we send the outsider away?"

Both of them were clearly frightened. Well, if someone with bulging muscles like this suddenly appeared, it would be totally normal for the body to feel fear.

"Shut up!"

The brawny man flatly declared.

Hii - Two of them leaked a small voice, and I unintentionally burst into laughter from amusement.

"To be ripping money from such lovely girl, it's not a good thing to do! I will now beat your character into shape! Come!"

Saying so, the brawny man caught both them by the napes and started running.

"Eh, Wha..... that, I don't want it! Stop!"

"Anything but muscles! Anything but muscles!"

"I will teach you both the magnificence of the world of muscles! Fuhahahahaha!"

"No! Let go! Let me gooo!"

"Uwaaah! I'm sorry! I won't ever trick another person!"

"Fuhahahahahahahaha! Hahahahahahahahaha!"

.....

I who was left behind, continued waving my hand towards their screaming figures.

Even after their shapes became as small as a grain of rice, the voices of agony of those two continued resounding on and on throughout the vast grasslands.

And they all lived happily ever after.

What would become of those two and the brawny man from now on?

In the end, that's a story that has no relation to me.

## CHAPTER 6

# HAPPINESS IN A JAR

## PART 1

Calm plains. The wind was blowing across the grassland that seemed like it was dyed in faint green color. The flowers shined from receiving the sunlight, and swayed from the wind just like the water surface.

Looking up, a cloud so small it seemed like it could be touched by hand was leisurely swimming through the sky.

Among such breathtaking scenery, one Witch was flying upon a broom. Her age was in later teens. She was clad in a black robe and black tricorne, and on her chest was a star-shaped brooch. There's no need to say who that was, right? —That's right, it's me.

While I was enjoying the pleasant scenery with a view that seemed to clean my heart, I saw a figure of a person standing alone in the middle of grasslands. When that person saw me, they started waving their hands.

There were no signs of hostility. I also waved back. With utmost elegance.

"Heey! Heeey!"

That person was jumping up and waving hands to make his existence known..... Come, is that what they mean?

I slightly shifted my broom and headed towards him.

"Ohhh! You came!"

The person standing there was a single boy. He was holding a jar in one hand.

"Hello."

I got down from my broom and bowed.

"Hello. Onee-san, so you were a Witch. That's amazing."

The boy glanced at the brooch on my chest and smiled widely.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm searching for happiness."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Searching for happiness is what it sounds like," the boy said. "By the way, Onee-san, do you have some spare time?"

Is he inviting me on a date? Nono, there's no way it's that.

"If you are asking whether I have spare time, I have it, but if you are asking if I'm busy, I am."

"So then, you do have a spare time!"

.....

"By the way, isn't there a village or a city around here?" If there's no place I can stay at, I will have to sleep on the grasslands."

I can't say if that choice would improve my mood.

"If you are looking for a village, it's over there."

At the place he was pointing at..... there certainly appeared to be something like a village standing there.

"Houhou"

"Incidentally, that's my village."

"So you are a village head? Nice to meet you. I'm called Elaina. A traveler."

"Ah, nice to meet you, I'm Emil— That's not it! I mean, that's the village where I live," Emil-san said with swollen cheeks.

"I know. I was just joking."

I gave a smile.

The sulky Emil-san held the jar with both hands and became silent.

As I dropped my line of sight to that jar, I saw something wriggling inside of it. Straining my eyes to look closely, it was a white mist.

White mist seemed to be floating inside the jar like a living thing.

"What's that?" I pointed at the jar.

Maybe he wanted me to ask that. Emil-san answered back acting proud.

"This is a jar that collects happiness! When people or animals experience happiness, it transforms to magical power and gathers in the jar."

"Oh?....."

With magic, one can move things, change its form to fire or ice..... and manipulate it for all kinds of things, so it's possible to reproduce the thing in front of me. Using that to fly with broom, alter the wind, or change one's appearance into a mouse is called Magic.

Collecting happiness when it's experienced, what that means is that emotions are converted into magic power, huh?

It seems a little interesting.

"Can I open it and see?"

"O-of course you can't!"

As I extended my hand, Emil-san gripped the jack with both hands even tightly and retreated back.

He declared with eyes baring hostility.

"This is something made for the person I love, so Onee-san can't touch it!"

"Houhou."

"A-are you angry?"

"No, I was just impressed."

I remembered a book I read long ago.

It was a tale about a husband, who for the sake of wife who couldn't leave house due to illness, wandered the world outside, and



returned home to show his wife the beautiful sceneries he saw by reproducing them with Magic. How did that story end again? It's a story from long ago, so I seem to have forgotten.

"Who's the girl you like?"

"Hm? It's the servant called Nino who works in my house. Her face always looks gloomy, so I want to bring her happiness"

"That's why I'm collecting happiness in a jar,"

—Saying that, he raised the jar up and displayed it.

His expression looking at the jar like a lover was the very happiness itself. To the point that if his emotions were reproduced with magic, it would be able to easily fill up the jar with happiness.

After that, we got on broom and headed towards the village. I talked about how magic power worked from a while ago so I never got to ask, but he was a Magician.

That reminds me.

What in the world was Emil-san doing in the middle of grasslands?

"I was testing whether I could extract happiness from plants as well"

"How was it?" I asked to Emil-san flying behind me.

"It's complicated. I managed to reproduce something like the emotions of plants, but for some reason, their color became impure so I abandoned it"

"My my"

Well, they were plants in the end, huh. If you asked whether plants had distinct emotions, I would only bend my head in wonder. If by chance I learned that they had emotions, there's a chance that I would not eat salad from now on, so I want to avoid clarifying that fact as much as possible.

"Ah, it's that."

He pointed at the village that appeared in front of us.

It was a tiny village. To the extent that if you walked along the fences full of shortcomings that were lined up instead of outer walls, you would return to the same place in less than one hour.

The amount of houses was about several dozens. Houses of similar appearance were scattered, and as if to fill up the gaps, small fields and wells were placed in between.

Well, it's how it is.

"It's a quiet village."

"Right?"

Getting down off the broom, we passed through two trees that were there instead of a gate and entered the village.

Up ahead the straight road, there stood a fine mansion which was clearly bigger compared to other houses. Although I said big, it was to the degree of inns of other countries.

"Is that the house of village head?"

As I pointed at the mansion, he assented.

"That's right. And it's also my house."

"Oh?"

Then saying this village was Emil-san's wasn't necessarily wrong.

"...That reaction was quite weak, Onee-san."

"Would it be better if I was surprised? Wow, amazing! You are so rich!"

"Yea..... whatever, never mind already....." Emil-san became gloomy, as if shadow was cast on him.

"By the way, Emil-san, when are you going to give that jar to her?"

Instantly, his face was lit up. He's an interesting boy with extreme

jumps in emotions.

"Now! I will give it to her after today's meal at noon. Ah, that's right, Onee-san should also come to eat. The food made by Nino-chan is absolutely delicious!"

"I'm thankful, but I already ate just recently."

"Then try just a little from Nino-chan! Ah, do you have any food you dislike? I will request to avoid it."

It looks like I have to eat by all means.

However, I have no reason to refuse right?

"I don't have anything I dislike, but I really ate just recently so just a bit, okay?"

"Leave it to me! I will give you food that's absolutely delicious!"

No, the one who's going to make the food isn't you but Nino-chan, right?

## PART 2

Like that, I ended up visiting the village head's house.

Compared to its outward appearance that was quite big, inside it was pretty ordinary.

In the dining room where Emil-san guided me to, there was old-looking furniture lined up. Just like the modest situation of the village, the village head didn't live in prosperity it seemed. Rather, there was an impression that they couldn't handle the place that was too large.

"Now, lets sit."

Emil-san pulled a chair and urged me to sit so I sat.

"That you—By the way, where is the servant?"

"Who knows? She will probably come soon."

"How about the village head?"

"Will come soon, I guess?"

"What's with that nonchalant expression?"

It was a time when Emil-san and I exchanged such words.

I felt a presence behind—no, to be more accurate, I just heard the sounds coming from behind.

In any case, I turned around.

".....Ah."

There was a girl standing there. Just as our eyes met, her shoulders flinched, so she gave a small nod, seeming as if she was scared of something. It was quite an innocent attitude.

Judging from the attire, she was a servant. She wore a slightly largish apron dress (Maid clothes, in other words) on her petite build.

"Why hello—Are you perhaps a person of eastern origins?"

She had charming, straight black hair and dark brown eyes. She had an appearance like that Apprentice Witch-san of eastern origin that I met in some country once. That Apprentice Witch-san's hair was a bit shorter though.

"Ehh? U-Um....."

Asking about someone's origins was impolite after all, huh—As if asking for help, her gaze shifted to Emil-san.

"That's right. My father picked Nino-chan from an eastern country."

"And then had her work in this house as a servant."

The girl called Nino-chan gave a small nod. "Y-Yes..... I have received a great amount of kindness from village head-sama."

That reply was so mechanical that it seemed like she was reading an already prepared manuscript.

"Where is that village head-sama right now?"

"Ah, erm.... Now, he is in the office, doing work....." She said while grasping the hem of her dress. "Um, would you like to order something?"

"Nothing in particular," I shook my head.

In any case, it seemed I would meet him at dinner, and there was no need to expressly meet him either.

After she ended the talk with me, she downcast her eyes as if trying to avoid making any eye contact with me. It seems talking to people isn't one of her strong points.

However, the boy in love wasn't worrying about that at all. Walking as if jumping, Emil-san rushed over her side and cut in her line of sight.

"Hey hey, Nino-chan, what's for lunch today?"

His back was turned towards me so I couldn't see his expression, but it was probably no different from a wide smile.

"Ah, t-today..... We have a grilled fish as demanded from village head-sama."

"Ohh! Hey, if it's alright, can you make a portion for her as well?"

Emil-san pointed towards me, and Nino-san quickly glanced towards me and made a small nod.

"How about it, Onee-san?"

"That would be good. Thank you very much. But, I'm not really hungry so only a bit would be enough."

".....Y-Yes"

Just as Emil-san said, Nino-san's expression was gloomy indeed. Judging by her expression, it looked as if we were teasing her.

"Ah, that right. Nino-chan, I have a present for you after this meal"

"Eh, f-for me.....?"

"Yes. Look forward to it."

"N-no..... It's okay. If you give present to a servant like me..... village head-sama will be angered....."

Her expression changed to the point that it went beyond humbleness.

"It's fineee, I will properly explain it to father."

"But....."

Getting tired of Nino-chan's indecisiveness, Emil-san took a forced action. "Then, this is an order from me. How about this?"

"....."

His honest feelings should have reached her for certain. Nino-san slowly gave a nod saying, "If it's an order...." and faintly smiled.

Looking at her, I felt that he also smiled.

After that, I got very bored.

Emil-san went to lend a hand to Nino-san and left me, the guest alone in dining room. I also headed towards the kitchen to help, but he refused with a smiling face saying "Onee-san just sit! The two of us will make the food!"

There was no one to talk to, nor was there anything to do, there was just time that ticked and ticked, in short, it was extremely unproductive. I couldn't ease my mood. I wanted to read at least a book. But I wasn't carrying any, so I couldn't do that.

In the end, I just sat on the chair and passed the time in idleness.

I waited several minutes.

"It's unusual to have visitors."

Saying so, a plump man sat on the opposite side from me. He couldn't be called old, nor was he young, and his age seemed to be somewhere between mid-thirties to forties. Probably. Maybe.

"Hello. Are you perhaps the village head?" I asked while holding such firm conviction.

"That is so."

As I thought.

"I am a friend of your son, Elaina. A traveler. Nice to meet you."

"You are quite polite. I'm Emil's father."

I know.

However, he appeared with great timing. I have too much spare time after all.

"How long have you been acting as a head of this village?"

"I have been a village head ever since this village was built."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"It's a lovely village."

"Yes."

"By the way, are there any special things in this village?"

"There aren't."

"At all?"

"Yes."

".....Is that so?"

I think I continued the useless talk with village head after that, but honestly, I don't remember what we talked about at all.

In short, it was somewhat fine conversation.

Then, after a short while, Nino-san and Emil-san returned while carrying the cookery.

While two of them were setting up the dining table, along with the faint sense of hunger, I felt unease because of that which couldn't be seen.

"....."

I think I asked for a small portion of food, but...



## PART 3

"Eh? Have you sized it down properly?" To my question, Emil-san blankly answered. "Look, it's a little fish, and the salad isn't much either."

Well, now that he said it, it indeed appears to be small. But I would've been fine if it was about half of your portion.

"Um..... I-Is it perhaps a bit too much.....? If you can't eat it all, it's fine to leave it....."

"....."

I was silenced. Next to Nino-san, Emil-san was narrowing his eyes as if trying to say 'don't leave anything!'

So in the end.

I ate it. I ate it all without leaving anything.

It was certainly delicious cookery, but I only enjoyed it at the beginning. And ended up cramming the remaining part into my stomach. It was too much.

"Thank you for the food! It was delicious, Nino-chan."

"T-Thank you.... very much," Nino-san bowed shyly. "I will tidy up the tableware....."

Then she stood up and collected plates and glasses. Emil-san also assisted with it as if it was natural.

In that case, I'll also help— Thinking that, I stood up, but I was once again stopped with a smile saying, "Onee-san, it's okay."

As both of them went towards the kitchen, I asked to the village head "Where did you meet Nino-san?"

While pouring the remaining glass of water down his throat, the village head, "In the east, I bought her," said that as if it was natural.

Bought her. In short, that means: "Is she a slave?"

"Yes. It's a matter from few years ago. It was a time when my wife left the house, and I was troubled about housework."

"....."

There were things I wanted to say, but I endured. Staying silent, I urged him to continue.

"At that time, I was in some business on eastern country and met her there. She was slightly expensive, but she could somewhat do housework, and what's more, she had a face which seemed like she would become a beauty in future. That's why I bought her without wavering. Just as I anticipated, she became a good servant."

The village head laughed indecently.

"Is Emil-san aware of that?"

"I should've told him, but he seems not to particularly mind her being a slave."

Emil-san said village head picked her up so there's a probability that he isn't aware of her being being a slave.

Even if Nino-san was a girl bought as a slave, I feel that if it's him who isn't two-faced, he wouldn't change at all even now.

Nino-san, who quietly came back from kitchen while our conversation was in halt, confirmed that our glasses became empty and took them away one by one. The fact that she was constantly looking down while doing that means that she overheard our conversation.

"Nino-chan, where should we put the big plate again?"

"Hii.....!"

She made a ear-piercing sound.

Emil-san, who suddenly came out of kitchen, and Nino-san, collided directly with each other, and the glass she held fell down.

Fragments of various sizes have scattered below their feet.

"What are you doing?!"

An angry voice came from the opposite side of me. The village head quickly stood up and gripped the collar of dumbfounded Nino-san.

"Clean it at once! Can't you even manage this?! When will you be able to finish any work perfectly?!"

"I-I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry....."

"Stop it father! Wasn't it my fault just now?! Stop blaming Nino-chan alone!"

"You be quiet!"

Flinching his shoulders, Emil-san hung his head down.

Perhaps he was tired of yelling, he let go of her and jerked his chin while saying, "Clean it up!" With tears in her eyes, Nino-chan nodded over and over and bowed towards them and me many times, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry....." while repeating that like an incantation.

To be honest, I couldn't watch it.

It was extremely unpleasant. It was disagreeable.

I pulled the chair, squatted down next to the glass fragments, and took out my staff.

"If I fix the fragments, there would be no need to clean."

Time reversal magic is convenient for things like healing injuries or repairing things. Something white as the mist grazed the fragments gently and turned back their time into its original form.

I handed the glass which became same as before to Nino-san. "Be careful not to drop it from now on, okay?"

The girl in question had an expression that said she didn't understand what just happened.

"No, my bad. I showed you a shameful thing and you even repaired the glass," butting in the conversation, the village head said in a calm tone.

"Hey, you thank her properly as well."

No, thanking isn't something to do by being enforced.

".....I'm sorry"

Furthermore, Nino-san who was interrupted quietly said something completely different. That's not it.

"It's not 'I'm sorry', It's 'Thank you', Nino-san," I told her.

Then, Nino-san raised her face that seemed about to burst into tears at any time and squeezed a voice, "Thank you, very much."

## PART 4

"I can also do that level of Magic."

After the village head went to reading room, and Nino-san returned back to dish-washing, Emil-san's face became sullen.

Even though it would be fine if he stopped forcefully acting tough.

"Oh dear. I'm sorry. Was that unnecessary?"

"No, I wasn't able to do anything after all. Thank you, Onee-san."

"You are welcome."

"But, even I could do that much."

"....."

It was probably embarrassing to show such shameful sight to the beloved girl.

"You shouldn't worry about it," I hit his shoulders with both hands. "By the way, Nino-san is feeling down now right? Isn't this the best chance to give her the present?"

"! Onee-san, are you perhaps a genius.....?"

"Fufufu. You can praise me some more."

Emil-san, who found a hope, had his mood easily brightened. What a simple kid. It's nice.

Emil-san, with the jar held behind his back, was waiting for Nino-san to finish her work.

"....."

Nino-san, who came out of the kitchen with a dark face, flinched from Emil-san's sudden appearance. It was a reaction like that of a small animal. She surely remembered about the moment they collided.

Emil-san stopped at one step's distance.

"Nino-chan. I said I had a present for you after the meal right?"

".....Y-Yes."

Nino-san answered back hesitantly.

"Here. This is the present."

Emil-san took the jar he was hiding and carried it before her eyes. Having no idea what it was, Nino-san stared at the white mist wriggling inside with a puzzled face.

"This is a jar filled with happiness."

Emil-san touched the jar cap.

"Inside, It's packed with happiness of various people that I met in various places."

".....Happiness, of people?"

Nino-san inclined her head and Emil-san smiled.

"You won't see it with just a glance, so look carefully."

With a pleasant sound, the cap came off.

From the jar that had lost cover, white mist leapt out and reached to the ceiling. Then, as it covered the ceiling in white like a cloud, it started to slowly rain down in small drops.

The glass-like drops reflected the sunlight and shined, and created an illusion. These were the fragments of people's happiness. The grains of light reflected the happiness that he gathered.

The happiness from the childbirth. The happiness from seeing a beautiful scene. The happiness from lovers walking together. Meager happiness from discovering pretty flowers. The happiness that resembled pleasure felt when overcoming hardships. The gentle happiness felt when falling asleep when reading a book on a day off while basking in sunlight.

"You see, the outside world is full of such happiness,"

Emil-san said while holding Nino-san's hand.

"That's why, stop having a gloomy face. Because I will make you happy"

Nino-san...

Looked at the grains of light in pure amazement, and before long had started to quietly cry. She shed tears while holding a hand over her mouth so that her voice wouldn't leak.

Emil-san, who laughed as if troubled, had silently embraced her.

The flowing tears...

Burst and shone just like the fragments of happiness.

## PART 5

"It would be alright even if you stayed a bit longer."

A pair of trees lined up instead of a gate. Emil-san, who expressly escorted me to the village exit, felt despondent like an abandoned puppy.

Next to him stood the servant Nino-san. Since her expression wasn't great since the start, I couldn't see whether she was saddened about parting with me.

I shook my head.

"I'm sorry. But, I can't remain for too long."

Saying so, I took out the broom.

".....Come and stay again okay? At that time, me and Nino-chan will treat you to even more delicious feast. Right?"

"Y-Yes..... We'll be waiting."

Nino-san bowed.

"Yes. I'll come again—I will for sure one day"

Perhaps when I finish the journey.

They waved their hands as I grew distant. Emil-san waved his hands in full spirits. Nino-san quietly waved just the part up to the elbow.

".....?"

Suddenly, my eyes met Nino-san.

They were eyes like deep darkness. However, that wasn't simply the dark color, but like the kind of dark that seemed they essentially carried the darkness.

As if full of some kind of despair. Just like a dead person.



They seemed to be different from when I saw them for the first time in village head's residence.

.....What was it?

While I was recalling that, the next town became visible.

It was the end of the book I read long ago.

The tale about husband who for the sake of wife who couldn't leave house due to illness, wandered the world outside, and returned home to show his wife the beautiful sceneries he saw by reproducing them with Magic.

Even though it left quite bad memories as an aftertaste, why had I forgotten it until now?

The wife, who deeply yearned for the dreamy sceneries, unreasonably moved her body which originally couldn't be moved, and died far earlier than what was left of her lifespan—That was the conclusion of that tale. In the end, "Believing that you are doing something for someone isn't always correct," - it was a story that had hints of such preaching.

When Nino-san saw the contents of that jar, I wonder what she felt. What did she decide?

Perhaps...

"....."

No, it can't be. There's no way right?

Turning around, the wind was blowing through the grasslands that stretched and dyed everything in a pale green. The flowers shined from receiving the sunlight, and swayed from the wind just like a water surface.

It was truly a beautiful scenery.

But I will never visit it again.

After all, I would most likely end up feeling nothing but sad even if

I come.

## CHAPTER 7

# BEFORE THE CONTEST BEGINS

## PART 1

Early morning, I have arrived at a certain country. It was a country I saw by chance while flying on broom, so I had no information about what kind of country it was.

It was unneeded for such small village that didn't even have gate, but normally when you enter the country that owns the land, almost always there is an inspection done by the gate soldier.

That said, aside from special cases, they would just ask pretty general questions.

"Who are you?"

"Elaina."

"Country of origin?"

"It's known as the peaceful country of Robetta."

"Reasons for entry?"

"Sightseeing."

"What's the duration of stay?"

"Probably around three days."

Usually, the questioning would end at this, if it was a country that required toll, you would pay the money and the gate guard would step aside saying "In that case, please take care."

"For breakfast are you in bread faction? Or rice faction?"

It seemed the questioning was still ongoing. And it was a vague question.

".....Excuse me?" I frowned and asked again.

The gate guard answered without changing his expression even a bit, "Again, for breakfast are you in bread faction? Or in rice faction? It's a necessary information when entering the country so

please answer honestly."

Are there food competitions happening in this country?

But if it's a necessity, let's answer honestly. Though I do think that it's a little improper question for the formal procedure setting.

"I'm not in either faction. I am a traveler, therefore I change the faction to match the culture of the country."

I can't eat anything but bread! - You can't say that in the country with rice-centered culture right? Same goes for opposite. So, I have decided to maintain a neutral standing.

"I see..... That's unusual," Gate guard stroked his chin and said.

"I see, I understand. Then, let's put in both of them as your decision."

After that, the gate guard moved aside and said:

"Take care, Witch-sama."

I bowed to the gate guard and passed through the gate.

## PART 2

I immediately understood the reason of that strange question.

It seemed that this was a country where two cultures had mixed together.

There was a giant waterway near the gate entrance. And centering on that waterway, there were eastern houses lined up on its left side and western ones on its right.

What's more, there were two roads before the gate. On the right, "Eastern district: People of rice faction, this way!" and opposite to it, "Western district: People of bread faction, this way!" were written.

Looks like the country is divided as rice and bread factions on the inside.

"...Hmm."

I hesitated. I don't really mind either of them.

But thinking about it, wouldn't this be the first time walking to the eastern townscape? It's always just western style.

Then, it's decided.

I turned to the right.

The road there was composed of well-arranged rectangular stones. Looking up from it, there were formal wooden houses lined up in a row. The Royal Palace was visible ahead. It seemed to be right at the center of waterway, so I guessed it was the center of the divided country.

The road leading to the Royal Palace had a bridge built about about halfway. The new bridge seemed mismatched when compared to the historic townscape. Below the bridge's arc, one could see the reflection of a small boat passing through.

".....?"

I ended up being puzzled because of the strange appearance of the person on top of it.

It was a boy having a breakfast while sitting on a handrail. It was obvious that he was a person of eastern district from the fact that he was clad in kimono, but no matter how you looked at it, what he held in mouth was bread. A person of rice faction was eating bread.

Next to him, there was a figure of a woman who was appetizingly stuffing her cheeks with onigiri. It seemed she was from the rice faction. Despite wearing a one-piece dress.

I became curious. Somehow, it was a very unusual sight.

"Um, excuse me."

I called out to the two.

Two of them exchanged glances, then the boy replied to me "Is something wrong?" Bread in his hand. But wearing a kimono. As expected, it's strange.

I asked after quickly introducing myself, "Just what kind of country is this?"

"What kind of country you ask.... hmm." after folding his arms, he asked to the woman next to him, "Hey, what kind of country is this?"

"Isn't it a lovely country."

"Yeah, that's right. It's a lovely country. Yes, Traveler-san, it's a lovely country."

What I want to know isn't that, it's more.....

"The townscape is lovely, but you are lovely as well."

"Oh stop it, you are even lovelier."

"Ufufu."

"Ahaha."

.....

Looks like I'm just a hindrance here. It would be better to leave at once.

Yes, I sensed that I wouldn't get any useful information from them, it's not that I wanted to wrap it up quickly or something you know? No, really.

In any case, I quickly thanked them and left.

I walked about the east and west districts, while talking to people to obtain the information I was seeking.

However, the more I walked around, the stranger I felt. I didn't notice it earlier in the morning as there were few people about, but once the number of people increased around noon, it became hard to differentiate between the two districts as the people freely intermingled between east and west using the bridge.

What was even strange, was that the shopkeepers whose stalls had notes saying, "We don't sell to people of rice faction," despite saying so, were handing over the goods to people dressed in fine kimonos.

It wasn't just the stalls. It seemed there was some official regulation in effect, as all stores, regardless of whether they were general stores or greengrocers had signboards saying that customers from the opposite side wouldn't be served.

But not a single person was minding that. It was as if the signboards held no meaning.

After I returned from the western side to the eastern district, I passed under the sign of the dumpling seller.

"Welcome. What would you like to eat?"

As I sat on the chair, Onee-san wearing Japanese clothes leaned over in front of me. Facing the "We don't sell to people of bread faction" sign that was outside, "I am in a bread faction."

I said that.

"What kind of joke is that?"



After covering her mouth with hand, Onee-san started leaking the giggles. It was a refined gesture.

"What do you mean joke?"

Gazing up at me with narrowed eyes, Onee-san said, "There are no people who mind such decorations are there?"

Certainly, if you look at the situation on the streets, I can surely say that there are no people who mind the signboards. But if that's the case, then what's the purpose of the signboard?

"So, what is your order?"

"Ah, three mitarashi dango please."

"Coming right up!"

## PART 3

While feeling uncomfortable, I searched for an inn at the western district.

Although there was an inn on the eastern district as well, it was no good for me there. I can't sleep if there's no bed. In other words, eastern inns are disturbingly difficult to deal with. the feeling of walking barefoot on grass just doesn't sit well with me.

I walked about in the district and finally entered the cheapest looking inn. "People of rice faction aren't allowed to stay." It was an inn with such signboard put on. Well, let's ignore that.

"Welcome."

When I entered, on the other side of the counter, there was a shopkeeper who seemed to lack motivation resting his chin with hands.

"I want to stay for a night," I said as I took out a silver coin.

"Thank you for staying. Now, fill out the form."

"Okay."

I'm already used to this. I finished writing really quickly.

Then, while I handed the filled paper back to the shopkeeper, "If it's alright, can you please tell me about this country?" I asked him.

".....Don't think I've seen your face before miss customer, are you perhaps a traveler?"

"Yes. That's why I can't help but be curious about this country."

To my question, the shopkeeper stayed quiet for a while— "What do you want to hear?"

and said so. Oh, he's easy to talk to. Still, it's just doing business with a traveler.

"In that case, please tell me the reason of different situations between east and west?"

The shopkeeper told me the things I wanted to know.

"Originally, this country was two countries who were side by side to each other across the waterway. The country on the east followed the eastern culture, and the one on west side followed western. Each of the two countries had a king controlling it. Those two kings were on good terms, and interaction between them was also popular—Well, the situation wasn't much different from now."

"Hmm, I see."

Easy to understand.

"One day, the two kings started discussing. On whether they should turn the two countries into one. There came no opposition to that, since both western and eastern countries had the same intentions. Rather, it felt like this took too long."

"Was the bridge connecting two districts built at that time?"

Shopkeeper gave a nod. "Yes, That's right. That's something those kings built to celebrate the merging."

"I see."

So that's why it looks unusually new.

"At around that time, each of the kings had a child born. The Eastern King had a girl, while western king had a boy. Just like the kings, they were close to each other and before long, they got married and ahead of the waterway—Or in other words, in the country's center, they built a royal palace and lived there. Even now, those two are the symbols of this country."

That's the kind of feeling this country has judging by what I know about it.

The shopkeeper spoke while putting the room's key on the counter. While taking it, I said, "Thank you. By the way, can I ask

one more thing?"

"What could it be?"

I talked about the strange question they asked me at the country's entrance, about the strange banners put in front of the gate and stores, and also about the pair on the bridge.

"I first thought that the country was divided in two parts, but looking at the situation, it appears as if people don't care about things like signboards at all. Crossing the bridge, the exchange between them is strong. But that being the case, what reason is there for the signboards?"

Shopkeeper quietly listened to my talk and then nodded with affirmation.

"Those signboards are prepared for the contest."

He said that rather easily, so I doubted my ears.

"A contest? What the heck is it for?"

"It seems that those two want to unify the country to either eastern or western culture —So, in any case, the reason of gate guard's strange question and the signboards is something like that."

A move to destroy the country which the previous kings unified while leaving their respective merits, is that how it is?

But, why?

"Those two don't know the word called compromise."

Shopkeeper laughed.

Incidentally, he demanded a fee for the information afterwards.

## PART 4

After that, I stayed for a few days and then started preparing to depart from the country. The country which mixed western and eastern culture together was truly fascinating, but if I had to say it, that's all there was to it.

There's wasn't anything else particularly interesting, that's the kind of impression I had.

In the end, the most important parts were left unanswered, but well.... that's that? It's not something I would get bloodshot eyes over. But if someone were to tell me how the signboards came to be I'm all ears.

Well, that's that I guess—While forcibly coming to agreement, I passed through the gate.

"Ah, please wait a moment Witch-sama."

And I stopped. The spear held by gate guard was set up horizontally, blocking the path ahead.

".....Is something wrong?" I made a confused face.

"If possible, can I take a bit more of your time?"

".....? Why?"

Depending on the time, place, and circumstances, one won't be as reluctant to listen to what they're told. If it's just some trivial thing, I would just decline and depart from the country, but...

"His majesty the King and Princess have summoned you."

".....Eh."

It seems that it's not a trivial thing.

In the place far along the waterway. I was guided to the Royal Palace built as if to overlook the two cultures.

After walking within the ambiguous castle which was a mix of east and west, I arrived in the hall. The hall felt as if eastern and western rooms were cut in half and glued together.

It's quite unsettling...

Feeling the door getting shut behind me, I started advancing. Two thrones were visible just up ahead.

Man and woman sitting there were having a quarrel—And didn't even seem to notice my existence.

"Didn't I say that the contest method should be a shogi? Anything but that is impossible!"

"Isn't your side advantageous in shogi! It should be chess, how many times should I say for you to get it!"

"How many times should I say that chess gives advantage to your side!"

"Gununu...."

"Fununu...."

They gave off such a dangerous atmosphere that it seemed like they would start fighting anytime now. Sitting on thrones, the two of them glared at each other.

To make my existence known, I coughed once. It's purpose couldn't be clearer. But the two have noticed me.

"Oh? Are you perhaps..."

"The aforementioned traveler? oh my..."

I bowed. "I was told that you two had business with me, so I was invited here—that said, what business do you have with me?"

"Yes. Actually—"

King who opened his mouth to speak was stopped by the Queen.

"I will tell it to Witch-sama myself."

"What? from here, I will..."

"No. I will say it."

Either is fine so hurry up and start talking would you? Come on.

In the end, after they quarreled over and over, it was decided that King would be the representative to tell me everything.

"You see, presently this country is having a war—Because me and that woman are on bad terms as you can see. However, before having the match, we haven't decided its method. From what we heard, you don't belong in either faction and have a neutral standing right? That's why, we wish that you would decide its fate."

"...Won't you decide the method?" No, before that. "Why did you even decide to have a context in the first place?"

As I said that, the King raised his voice.

"That's because this woman insulted the people of west side saying 'People who don't eat rice for breakfast aren't even humans.'"

Queen instantly objected to King's words. "No. It's you who said 'Those who don't eat bread for breakfast are nothing but animals.'"

"Okay, that's already enough. Be quiet for a while you two."

"....." "....."

It's annoying so be quiet.

Then, as I got the grasp of the situation, I first addressed the King.

"Your Highness, the first thing that caught my eye when I entered this country were the signboards. They were strange things that divided into rice and bread factions, but just what kind of meaning did those have?"

"It was for easily seeing which side was larger." "Established to understand with our own eyes which of them was more prominent."

Why did Queen respond as well I wonder.....

Well, it's fine. It's bothersome so I won't delve in it.

"So what was the result?"

To my question,

"People of west are more in number." King answered.

"The east had more influential people." Queen also said.

"So I said it's good to have rule of majority."

"No. As I said, we have to decide the match from investment."

"In the end, looks like you don't get it at all."

"Same goes for you."

"....."

"....."

Two of them started glaring at each other once more.

And there, I suddenly thought. What was the topic of their conversation at the start when I entered in this hall I wonder? I recall they were yelling chess and shogi.

They were fighting over majority rule and investment, so how did board games emerge there?

Without asking that question, they started talking on their own.

"It can't be decided after all, huh. Then, how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide how to decide, I think I want to decide it by chess, but..." "No. Shogi."

"....."

"What a thick-headed fellow. Shogi would be advantageous for you" "What a dull-witted person. If it's chess, you will always excel at it!"

"....."



Somehow, I have the feeling that I can totally see the bottom of it.

To make sure of it, I asked the two.

"By the way, when did this quarrel start?"

Two of them looked at me at the same time, gathered their voices and said.

"Two years ago."

That.

"Ah. I see."

Then it's already impossible so just give up please.

Saying that, I left the royal palace. Without detaining me, the two of them continued to make racket.

## PART 5

I also understood why people got tired of the signboards and ignored them.

After they started contest about which culture should the country be unified to, already two years had passed. While the discussion wasn't advancing, only time had kept flowing, and perhaps there wasn't even a single person remaining who remembered that the signboards were put up for the contest.

At this point, they were just decorations.

But looking at it from the other way, it can also be said that King's influence had become meaningless to that degree. Because in this country, there is not a person who would earnestly listen to what king had to say.

"Aah, Witch-sama. How was this country?"

Gate guard welcomed me who came from the royal palace all the way to the gate. I passed next to him without stopping, and looked back as I took a step towards the world outside.

Then I spoke as I gazed at the strange country with mixed cultures.

"It's a nice, peaceful country."

That said, I don't know what would happen to it in the future.

Maybe those two will notice the time they spent so pointlessly until now and focus on the country.

Maybe at this rate, the country would be slowly dragged towards the wrong direction. Or perhaps, it will continue to stay this way.

Either way, that is something that no one knows.

"Isn't it? It's indeed a nice country."

The gate guard nodded with satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 8

# DURING THE JOURNEY – THE TALE OF TWO MEN COMPETING OVER A WOMAN

## PART 1

It was the post-rain forest where flowers shone from the lights spilling from the trees. The beautiful girl mounted her broom and flew off in a straight path that stretched from there through the horizon.

A star-shaped brooch on her chest. One hand on her three-pointed hat to keep it from being blown away by the wind. A black robe wrapped around her body. No matter how you look at it, she's a Witch. Who is she?

That's right, it's me.

Leaving the country that was divided into the two cultures of west and east a few days ago, I aimed at the nearest country, and mounted on my broom. It was just an ordinary country with nothing strange in it, or so I had heard. The builds of its citizens were leaning towards muscle loving, but otherwise they were pretty normal. Just what part of that is normal I wonder.

Well, if it was that muscle head who I'd met once, he would gladly settle in that country—But as for me, I would only be staying there for a day before departing.

I thought of such things as I watched the scenery passing by.

In other words, I had nothing else to do for the moment. That's why even the faint gossip coming from the silent forest were clearly reaching my ears.

"Then, let's confirm the rules once more. We will do one lap on the forest road up ahead, and whoever returns first will become her lover. Are you with me so far?"

"Y-Yeah. No problem so far, yes."

".....There's nothing unfair."

"O-Of course. T-There's no way I would do something like that."

".....I wonder about that."

These were the voices of one cheerful and one emotional men. It appeared that they were having a competition. As I thought about it, this time came the voice of a girl.

"Eh? In other words, I have to wait here all alone? Eeeh, I don't wanna!"

Her sentimental voice was heard very clearly, so I got surprised.

Then as I shifted my consciousness from my mind to the outside, I was surprised yet again. Our eyes met. Mine and hers.

A girl with seemingly lovely looks and black hair, "Ah, lucky." She muttered so.

.....Right.

## PART 2

Since our eyes had met, passing by her just like that would be awkward, so I dropped my speed.

Regretfully, that was a clear miscalculation.

Because that black-haired girl who had rushed up to me, forcefully dragged me down from the broom.

"Kyaa! So cute! Ah, that brooch, it's something only Witches carry, right!? So amazing! That means Onee-san, you are a Witch."

"Ah, yeah....."

"Amazing! You are this cute and a Witch, so amazing!"

"Uh, thanks....."

"Are you perhaps planning to show some Magic? Wait, just now you were flying right! Amazing!"

"Well, yeah....."

"By the way, do you have some time now?"

"No, well....."

"The two of you! I'll be waiting with this Onee-san here!"

"Umm....."

Hey, listen to me for a bit.

In the end, while being called things like "Cute" and "Amazing", I was slowly dragged along and brought before the two men.

The two of them stared at me and spoke.

"Together with Witch-sama you say? In that case, you don't need to worry about getting attacked by a bear or something. Very good," the Man with good looks said in a refreshing voice.

"Y-Yes. It's a relief, whew," said the plump man with rough breath.

.....

I whispered to the girl next to me.

"Wait, what kind of situation is this?"

"What do you mean?"

After making a wondering face, "I'm sorry, I haven't explained yet, huh. You see, those two are fighting over me." She explained.

No, that much I know. Because I heard it while flying.

What I wanted to ask wasn't something so trivial.

"Are these two fighting over you?"

I said in an extremely small voice so as they wouldn't hear it.

"Yes, so?"

She replied as if wanting to say 'Isn't that natural?'.

While having complex, indescribable emotions in heart, I once again looked at the two guys.

The spirited man's white teeth shone as he smiled. So radiant.

And the plump man standing next to that tidy man wiped his sweat. Stinky. He was a dirty man.

Even though there was a hopeless gap between their appearances, is she making these two fight over her? What is this idiocy? I don't really get that train of thought.

But, maybe the plump man is hiding some sort of special ability? Or perhaps, the eloquent man's character is extremely bad?

.....

Unfortunately, my interest grew a little.

"I see, I understand. Then, I will take on the task of protecting her."

In the end, I went along with the flow.



"Okay, ready, go!"

On my clap, the two of them broke out into a run at the same time.

"Uoooooooooh! Her heart is mine!" The tidy man started running with passion.

"U-ugh..... Haah, Haah." The dirty man grew tired the moment he started to run.

Eh? Isn't this strange. I had expected that the dirty man would show some terrible physical power and overtake him, but...

After both of their figures were no longer visible, I asked her a question.

"Why are you making them compete?"

She who was happily drinking the water, muttered "hmm?" and pointed at the bottle of water.

"This water, who do you think was the one who provided it?"

"Wasn't it provided by you?"

She shook her head.

"You see, this was provided by chubby. His outward appearance is untidy, and yet he is attentive to the smaller details, that guy."

"By 'Chubby'..."

It was most probably the dirty man.

It's quite a direct nickname. No, I agree on it, totally do, but.

"Ah, by the way, there's your share too."

".....How come there's my share?"

I became perplexed.

After all, I passed by here by chance.

"Some time ago, before the competition began, I secretly conveyed

it to him. It seems he brought a spare one. So, here."

She pushed the bottle to me. It's not that I'm particularly thirsty, but, well, let's accept it.

The water inside the bottle reflected the sunlight and shone.

But, I get it. He is certainly attentive. To think he even prepared my share.

"So in other words, you are saying that you fell in love with both inner self of fat guy and outer appearance of the spirited guy. What luxurious troubles."

Not that I'm jealous.

In that moment, she showed a dry smile,

"It's not like I particularly like Chubby, you know?"

And spoke those words.

.....Hmm?

"What does that mean?"

I most certainly thought that she made them compete because she was unable to choose from the two.

As she drank all of the water from the bottle, and made an ecstatic expression with a "Puhaa", "I had some free time so I just played with Chubby."

She said.

"....."

"But, he's useless, that Chubby. There's no way this much water could quench my thirst." She threw away the emptied bottle towards the forest.

After going on monologues about how dirty he was and stuff, saying something like this was totally the opposite thing to do so I didn't like it much, however, at that moment, I thought from the bottom of my heart. I hoped.

God, bring the judgment upon this woman.

## PART 3

Oh dear.

The judgment, it came.

It happened a few minutes after she threw the bottle away. All of a sudden, just as I thought that she was making a big yawn, she fell towards towards her back in that position.

With a bang.

Luckily, because the thickets acted as a good cushions, her head didn't take the blow.

Let's leave the fact that I smacked my lips within my mind a secret.

Since she fell senseless all of a sudden, I panicked, thinking whether she was dead, however there was nothing like that, and as I rushed to her, her sleeping breaths reached my ears.

Just like that, I was now taking a rest under the shade of a tree with her head on my lap.

"Uehehehe..... Muscles, so many muscles....."

She was not only a person with bad ideology, her sleep-talking was also bad. Just muscles, what kind of scene from hell is that?

Ten odd minutes had passed while I looked at her drool-smeared face and listened to her sleep-talking. The shadow of a person appeared to be approaching from far away.

Who in the world was that? No, there's no need to even think about that, the one who had returned was—

".....Eh."

I looked at the running silhouette as I blinked my eyes. However, no matter how many times I confirmed it, the one approaching was

him.

The dirty man.

Chubby-san.

.....Why?

Fuaah, haaah, He who had finally arrived after a long struggle covered in sweat had a face overflowing with a sense of accomplishment.

"H-Haah....., I did it, I-I won....ha hah....."

Yeah, my foolish self who had sympathized with him some time ago. His expression as he looked around, confirming that virtuous guy hasn't returned, was nothing but disgusting.

Physically impossible. Such words traveled inside my head. Yes, physically impossible.

But, where is the the guy who had overtook this dirty man now?

The answer to that, I discovered as I followed the sweat of the dirty man with my eyes. I saw the shape running here with unbelievable speed.

It was the tidy Man.

Seeing the dirty man smiling broadly, the Tidy Man burst into tears. The gentleman ran while crying. It would have made a good picture if he was alone or if a beautiful girl was waiting for him at the destination, however the fat guy was ahead of him, so that earnest scenery took the surrealism to the extremes.

And the finish line.

With lamentation following it.

"D-Damnit..... Why, why.....! Why did I fall asleep while I was running!?"

Fall asleep you say?

Are you an idiot?

The tale about a dunce turtle and quick-legged rabbit having a competition passed through my mind. If I'm not mistaken, the conclusion of that tale was, 'The careless rabbit ended up sleeping, and the turtle who kept steadily going took hold of victory, and left unpleasant emotions like 'Uwaah, the turtle is suspicious!'.

Maybe, it's same for him?

"Was it carelessness?"

Thereupon, the tidy man wiped the sweat and tears,

"No..... On the way, I became sleepy and when I came to, I had been sleeping there."

He dropped his shoulders.

.....Hmm.

Could it be, I thought.

Following the same trains of thought as me, the tidy man pointed sternly at the dirty man and raised his voice.

"You, you mixed the sleeping drugs in that water didn't you!?"

That's right, that's right.

Indeed, the other person who had drunk the water provided by him is now releasing sleeping sounds on my lap.

The dirty man exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulders as if treating the tidy man with contempt.

"Fu, Fuhe..... Do you have some evidence?" For some reason, the fact that only second part was excessively fluently spoken was endlessly irritating.

But it seems he had brought calamity upon himself.

In order to not wake the girl sleeping on my lap, I slowly moved her head from my knees and stood up.

"If it's proof you want, here it——"

I came to my senses in the middle of saying it.

What I had thrust out was an already empty bottle. ....Naturally, the proof was no more.

Speaking of which, its contents made me feel unpleasant, so I discarded it.

Such mistake.

Seeing such a miserable appearance, the dirty man's mood improved more and more. "See! There's no evidence anywhere! I did it, she became mine! Hihii."

".....Kh."

".....Kh."

Unfortunately, there was no strong evidence that he had cheated—Ah, that's wrong. Isn't there one more?

Putting down the bottle, I lifted the sleeping girl up.

"Please wait. This is the evidence."

"Fuhi..... If you think about it normally, wouldn't it be that she simply got sleepy and lied down?"

"No, she fell asleep because she drank the water you gave her."

"Where's the proof? Is there some proof of that I wonder? Hey, is there?"

"....."

S-So irritating.....!

She who had played with that dirty man was plenty guilty herself, but this guy went beyond even that and was a genuinely bad person. Rather, should I just blow him away with Magic?

.....Ah, that might be good.

Perhaps my composure was lacking, however that dirty man who picked a fight with me was irritating to no end.

Resentment.

Taking out my staff—

"Wait a minute!"

The voice was heard from above.

It was I voice which I might or might not have heard before.

Looking up, there was a certain giant from sometime ago standing there. On his sides were standing two men who could only be distinguished by the color of their clothes.

Ooh, what a thing.

Just this time, I thought if it was a savior who had appeared.



## PART 4

"Hello."

As I bowed at the three who descended, he loosened his face muscles. ....In other words, he laughed is what I meant. "It's been a while, Witch ojousan."

"It's been a while. Brawny Man."

It was the man with lovely muscles I had met few days ago. Brawny Man. I don't know his actual name. I think I don't really care, though. He is a strange guy who throbs on the word muscles, that's why, "Fufun, that's right. I am indeed a brawny man," he replied so while puffing out his chest. After all, the fact that he has muscles even on his brain never changes.

"You two as well, it's been a while."

I also bowed to the two people standing by his sides.

"It's been a while, huh."

"Yes, it sure has."

I somehow feel like their muscles have increased. They were two bad people who had tried to deceive me, but seeing their current selves with bulging muscles, I felt bad for them for some reason.

"Big brother, your skin became somewhat tanned didn't it?"

"I would say the same about you."

"Hahaha."

"Hahaha."

Correction.

It seems they are leading a completely brawny lifestyle.

Ignoring the two who had become moody from such trivial conversation, I secretly explained the matter to the brawny man in

detail.

*mumble mumble*

Brawny Man became enraged.

"Oh? I wonder which rotten Chubby fellow that was. Huh?

"W-Wrong! I-I-I-I did nothing wrong! I honestly excelled with my ability!"

"Don't lie!" the Brawny Man caught him by the collar.

*Hii*, the dirty man raise a groan resembling a shriek.

"I-It's not a lie!"

"In that case, let me examine you and find it out!"

"S-Stop! You mean people! You laughed in your hearts, thinking there was no way someone as ugly as me would ever obtain that girl, didn't you!? But, I worked hard and won! That is a fact! Accept it!"

He said while scattering the saliva. I overlooked the fact that the Brawny Man's expression was a little irritated.

At this rate, the unfair dirty man might be put on a public lynching.

Well, not that I mind it that much.

".....Hm."

As I blankly looked at the Dirty Man who was being reeled in by the Brawny Man, a voice resounded from behind me.

Maybe it was because of the Dirty Man making a racket, or maybe because she had enough sleep, but with that perfect timing, she woke up.

".....So noisy."

While fixing her slightly disordered black hair, she listlessly rose up.

And, after looking around, she spoke.

"Ah, was the winner decided?"

I kept silent for a while, but seeing that no one was saying a word, I informed her of the outcome.

"Ah, yes. Chubby ended up winning."

She had no reaction.

Then, after looking up at the sky, "But I don't want to go out with Chubby." She simply concluded so.

Simply, yet cruelly.

From such words that froze the atmosphere, the dirty man became motionless like a dead fish, the Tidy Man became nervous, the two brothers went on their happy talk about muscles without change, however, there was just one man who uttered words towards her.

It was the Brawny Man.

"You, what are you doing at such place?"

.....Hmm?

"O-Onii-chan. What are you doing here?"

.....Onii-chan?

"You, weren't you kidnapped by the brawny men?"

"Aah, those were the boyfriends I dated at that time."

That plural, what's up with that?

"I see, then what about now?"

"I was looking for a new boyfriend."

"Did you find one?"

"No good at all. There are only guys with meager muscles."

She said, glancing at the tidy man.

I put my hand on tidy man's shoulder who was growing pale by the minute. He started to cry yet again.

"Um, could it be that the sister in question..."

I asked to make sure. The brawny man nodded.

"Yeah. This is the one."

"....."

What the hell.

## PART 5

Like this, as the brawny man had found his sister, the three of them returned to his hometown, spending the time in happiness. And they all lived happily ever after.

Eh? Who was the third person you ask? Of course, it was the tidy man.

"P-Please wait! I-I will try my best to be acknowledged by Onii-san, that's why, can you please take me along with you?"

That gallant figure of his as he stepped forth while wiping away the tears as he said that was truly refreshing. Everything he did was worth picturing in one way or another.

After exchanging the looks, the brawny siblings,

"Fumu, you want me to train your muscles is it? I understand."

Saying so, the brawny man nodded as if giving his consent, then, as I wondered what reaction sister would give, she simply gave a yawn as if anything was fine.

Just what part of her is good I wonder?

Well, they say love is blind, so perhaps one day he would wake up from it and his heart would also settle down. That said, at that time, he might already be covered it muscles.

As I waved my hand to the three who departed, I heard a strange groan behind me. Ah, I forgot about this person.

Looking back, the dirty man was unsightly lying on the ground.

I don't feel like comforting him, so let's leave leave without noise.

"Hey, big brother, what is that pig thinking?"

"He's probably thinking 'My muscles are lacking'—Ah, hey, wait a minute. The brawny nii-san is gone."

"It's true. The brawny nii-san is gone."

"Could it be that he left us behind and left somewhere?"

"That's bad."

"Yeah."

The illusionist brothers who had to end their their muscle discussion at last seemed to not understand the situation around them.

That's why I decided to give them the explanation out of kindness.

Bla bla bla bla bla.

"What! That means the brawny nii-san quit his journey already?"

"What a thing? This is a serious situation, isn't it?"

"Well, it was something like that. He accomplished his ultimate goal in the strangest way possible."

Surely, after returning to the hometown, those three would lead a muscle-covered life.

But, isn't that quite fine?

"Now that you have been freed by the brawny man, aren't you going to get back to being illusionists again?"

To my such suggestion, the two made quite complicated expressions.

"Illusionists?"

"Illusionists?"

Could it be?

"No, when you met with me, you were illusionists. Did you forget that you tricked people and made money from it?"

".....Ah." ".....Ah." "That's right..... We were indeed illusionists....."

"Kh..... Because of spending our muscle-covered life, we

forgot....."

Muscles are great.

Well, they went with such flow.

Remembering their original roles, the three of them started to perform as an illusionist group, or so I heard. And they all lived happily ever after.

.....

Yes. As you might have guessed, the third one was the dirty man.

"Hey, you, won't you come with us?"

"That's right. You fit well with us. I'm sure you'd become a great illusionist."

The two of them with their hands on the shoulders of the crouching dirty man, proposed it to him quite simply.

Speaking of the dirty man in question, he was simply muttering some incomprehensible things with his face smeared in snot. So unsightly. However, it seems they understood him.

"It's okay. It's okay—Don't worry. You don't have to worry about it. We will properly teach you everything."

"You have a talent in you, that's what I thought from the moment I saw you. That's why, come along."

Before long, the dirty man agreed with a nod.

Thus, their illusionist group of three started their journey just like that. Starting their activity with the name "We and the Barrel", they skillfully solved the problem about combining their names, and before long, they grew into a circus that wandered the world...or perhaps they didn't. Whether it's truth or not, I do not now.

That, after all, is a story that has no relation to me.

## CHAPTER 9

# THE APPRENTICE WITCH ELAINA



## PART 1

I think the reason for the beginning of this story was surely because of this conversation.

"Congratulations on passing the Magic Exam, Elaina."

"Isn't it amazing that you became the youngest Apprentice Witch? You are our pride."

I, who had returned with a bellflower corsage attached to my chest, was congratulated by two of them without reserve. However, I still remember just how complicated my mental condition was back then.

If I'm not mistaken, I said such thing after sighing:

"But, I don't have much sense of accomplishment."

It wasn't because I was hiding my embarrassment, but rather it was how I truly felt. I didn't have the feeling that I had won, or maybe I just didn't feel anything at all.

In other words, I wasn't particularly delighted.

"Hm? Did something happen?"

To father's question, I answered as such:

"Everyone around was way too weak so it was a disappointment. At this rate, it won't be long before I become a Witch either."

".....Oh."

"Oh dear....."

The two of them had difficult expressions on their faces.

Perhaps it was because of this conversation, or perhaps the situation was called for because of the optimism and harsh tongue I had back then.

Because of it, I gained quite unpleasant memories.

Today however, it is but a reminiscent story.

## PART 2

It was about four years ago from today.

At that time, I didn't have black tricorn and robe like today, but instead wore a white blouse and black skirt—it is a story of the fourteen-year-old me.

The me of that time had passed the Magic Exam in one try, and immediately decided to apply as apprentice under a Witch-sama.

However, for various reasons, I didn't make that request with the Witches that lived in the peaceful country of Robetta which was my birthplace—or more accurately, it would be useless even if I did.

Therefore, I decided to use underhanded methods. ....No, rather than underhanded, I should say that I just heard some gossip.

It was the following:

"There lives a mysterious woman called the Witch of Stardust in a forest near Robetta."

The moment I heard it, I immediately hopped on my broom and went there. If it's not a Witch from Robetta, they might accept to become my teacher, I thought as such.

According to that rumor, the Witch of Stardust seemed to be a vagrant who had settled in a deserted tree house located deep in the forest.

I was half-doubting whether such person really existed.

That's why, the moment I saw her demeanor in the forest, I was really surprised.

"Ufufu..... Ahaha....."

"....."

Her hair was dark as the dead of night, and as if to match with it, she wore dark robe and tricorne with the star-shaped brooch on her chest.

That woman of unknown age—whose appearance was clearly Witch-like—was playing with the butterflies on the bush in front of the tree house.

Shall I turn back, I seriously thought so.

However, there weren't any Witches aside from the strange person before my eyes who I of that time could rely on.

".....Err, excuse me."

That's why, after some wavering, I called out to her.

She, who noticed me, bent her head while floating a smile.

"Ufufu..... Oh? Ohh? Could it be that you are..... Elaina-san?"

I was surprised. After all, this person who I was meeting for the first time knew my name.

"Do you know of me?"

Considering her disposition, I had a foreboding premonition.

And unfortunately, it hit the mark.

"Yes, you are quite famous. You are that cheeky brat who despite being fourteen years old won easily won in the Magic Exam by overwhelming all other Magicians."

"....."

"Of course, that's not my personal opinion. I'm sorry if I offended you."

".....It's fine. I'm used to it."

Since the Magic Exam was a narrow gate where only one person was accepted with each exam, I was conspicuous by having passed it at youngest age.

Of course, in a bad way.

It seemed that my appearance, as I easily defeated Magicians older than me, didn't fit well for the Witches living in my homeplace. All of them simultaneously rejected my request.

That's why I bet on the mysterious Witch that lived in the forest.

However, thinking that it would be hopeless since the gossip about me had reached this place, I had half-lost hope.

"So then, what business do you have with me?"

".....It's nothing."

I was about to take my leave. After all, I thought that it was already impossible.

She, however, said this to me:

"Were you perhaps trying to ask about apprenticeship? If that's the case, then I don't really mind. I have spare time anyway."

"Eh!"

I was surprised.

So much that for a moment, I didn't comprehend what she was saying at all.

"Why are you so surprised? Oh, could it be that you had some other request?"

"No, I certainly came to request to be taken as an apprentice, however....."

"Oh my. Since that's the case, then it's settled already. Starting today, you are my apprentice."

"No, but... uhhh, wha?"

With such an unexpected development, my confusion grew all the more.

I had thought that since she knew about me, she would reject me

just like Robetta's Witches did.

"Hm? You have quite complicated expression. I know what you are thinking. But be relieved. For I'm different from those fragile Witches from your hometown. To me it's irrelevant whether the other party is just a cheeky brat or whatever."

She spoke in a way to settle the topic.

Even to this day, I still remember how moved I was at that moment. Aah, I was finally able to meet someone who has recognized my ability, I thought.

"So then, are you going to become my apprentice? Or are you going to bow your head to the Witches of your hometown?"

Towards her, I bowed my head.

"..... I— won't return home. Please make me your apprentice."

This was how me and the Witch of Stardust—Fran-sensei—met.

Then, a few days after the training started.

Generally speaking about the training of Apprentice Witches, it would be their master teaching them Magic and further raising their Magic ability. Naturally, I thought it would be the same with me.

However, my relation with Fran-sensei was slightly different.

.....Rather, it was actually quite different.

If I had to describe how a normal day was for the me of that time, it would be something like this.

"Good morning, Elaina. I'm feeling hungry so please make something."

".....What would you like?"

Making food for Fran-sensei had become my daily routine.

"Let's see..... I feel like eating a steak."

"It's morning, so wouldn't that be a bit too heavy?"

"Then some of the weeds growing out there would be fine."

"Aren't you compromising a bit too much?"

In the end, it concluded by eating the bread I baked yesterday.

And so, until lunchtime, I self-studied Magic. Speaking about Sensei, she was doing some suspicious research, had been going to the forest to gather some edible plants, and did as she pleased.

"Sensei, I wanted to be taught Magic....."

"Oh. I'm sorry, I'm a little busy at the moment, can we postpone for some other time?"

Even if I earnestly requested it, she usually dodged it in such manner. She didn't even once teach me Magic.

But instead,

"Elaina, you will get worn out if you study too much. How about you take rest from time to time?"

She kept saying such things.

The condition for an Apprentice Witch to become a Witch was to be recognized by the person who became their master—however, I had not the slightest idea whether she recognized me no matter what I did. Because she didn't teach me.

Speaking of what one who had become an Apprentice Witch could do, it would be to work as hard as they can. At what you ask? Surely, that would be at everything.

Thinking that not teaching me Magic was so that I would become independent, I henceforth never asked a question even if there appeared something I did not understand.

However, Fran-sensei's requests started to worsen by the day.

"Elaina, we've run out of ingredients. Please go and buy them."

"Elaina, please head to the forest and catch about five geckos. I need them for research."

"Elaina, is dinner ready yet?"

"Elaina, there's a spider in bath. Please get rid of it. I'm scared of it."

"Elaina, please massage my shoulders."

Telling myself that this was also essential for becoming a Witch, I wordlessly complied with Fran-sensei's trivial requests day after day, just like a slave.

I still think that I did well enduring it.

I naturally had doubts of whether she simply wanted to use me. However, while it is true that I doubted her, I had no reason to run away. After all, there was no one at my home who would become my teacher even if I did return.

Endure it, endure it.

I just kept on studying and practicing by myself.

One night, before heading to bed, I indirectly asked to Fran-sensei: "Why won't you teach me Magic?"

To my question, Fran-sensei while yawning, "It's because you don't require teaching," lightly replied so.

As expected, the me of that time didn't fully understand the meaning behind her words.

As I continued to endure it, before I noticed, one month had passed since becoming her Apprentice.

It happened when I was doing my usual strange training of chopping up trees with Wind Magic, then setting fire to the created firewood with Fire Magic and finally extinguishing it with Water.



"Oh my. You are quite violent aren't you."

Fran-sensei stood behind me.

Thinking about it, this was the first and the last time she visited the place where I practiced Magic by myself.

Stopping my hands, I ran towards Fran-sensei. After all, I believed she finally felt like teaching me Magic.

However,

"Hm? What's wrong? There isn't really anything to teach you, you know?"

My slight expectation was momentarily crushed.

In the end, it seemed that she really didn't feel like teaching me Magic, and merely gazed at the practice site behind me.

There must be some meaning behind it—While repeating such words in my mind like a chant, I earnestly continued my meaningless practice.

"It should be about time....."

I had a feeling I had heard such a muttering.

On the next day.

She clapped my shoulders and spoke.

"Starting today, I will be testing you."

Perplexed by her crazy proposal, I seriously thought what was this person even thinking. However, more than that, I was overcome with happiness.

If I fare well on this exam, she will surely teach me Magic—I thought so.

Following Fran-sensei, we arrived on grasslands. The vivid

greenery fluttered to the wind and was spread as far as the eye could see.

Facing me, she grasped her staff and said without erasing her usual smile: "Right now, I will have you fight with me."

I was at loss.

She was obviously not someone I could defeat. Something like that was obvious without even trying it.

".....Are you joking?"

"Oh dear. There's no way I would joke at such serious scene now would I?"

She didn't even teach me Magic at all and yet she wants to fight all of a sudden? This is insane.

"But Fran-sensei, no matter how you put this....."

"Alright, let's begin."

She easily disregarded my modest objection.

As she clapped her hands to signal the start, she closed the distance between us in one go. And then, released her Magic from a point-blank range.

I became flustered. And panicked.

Being told about the exam all of a sudden. Fran-sensei purposely drawing near and attacking. Thinking about it now, she probably did that on purpose in order to disturb my pace.

It was quite underhanded.

".....Kh!"

However, the me of that time was nicely toyed with those underhanded tricks.

She used Magic attacks with a clear intent to kill. Magic mass. Heat beam. Wind blades. Rain of rocks. Lightning spear.

The battle result was naturally me being at disadvantage and defending one-sidedly.

At times I rolled on the grasslands, and at times repelled the Magic. At any rate, I just kept waiting for the opportunity to strike back.

"What's the matter? Is the ability of someone who overwhelmed everyone on the Magic Exam only to this degree? It seems it's nothing much."

Without loosening her attacks, Fran-sensei calmly said so with her usual smile. It was just too ominous.

—It was as if she was enjoying tormenting me.

Then I thought.

In the end, this person is the same as the Witches of my birthplace...

So that means, she took me as her Apprentice just so she could crush me, is it. And not teaching me anything would also be in order to shun me, wouldn't it?

During this one month, deep down I constantly had that doubt, but averted my eyes from it.

This person alone is different. It will be fine if I just believe. I endured it while telling myself such words.

And yet...

".....Tsk."

I felt like everything before me turned dark.

Before I noticed, I stood still, dumbfounded.

Fran-sensei also stopped her attacks, "Oh my. Is that all?" and sneered at me.

That became the final blow.

The various emotions that had accumulated until then burst

within me, becoming unable to be suppressed.

The despair of being betrayed by the person I trusted. The frustration of being unable to return the attack even once, although the opponent was a Witch. The sadness that despite trying my best, I was shunned, avoided, and wasn't recognized just because I was young.

The various emotions flowing endlessly shrouded my reasoning.  
My patience reached its limit.

"U-Ugh..... Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah....."

I cried. I sank down at that place and cried hard.

The large drops of tears flowing from my heated eyes overflowed heavily, and didn't cease no matter how much I wiped them.

I bit down on my lip wanting to at least suppress the leaking of my miserable cries, but I lost the way to put power to it.

I just kept crying in the middle of the grasslands.

It was quite unsightly.

"Huh? Eh? Hey....."

Fran-sensei looked at my image while darting her eyes about. Then it turned into something bewildering.

With suspicious movements, she rushed towards my side,

"I-I'm s-s-s-sorry! I didn't think you'd really cry....."

And while apologizing as such, she nervously waved her hands about.

"Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuu....."

"Oh my, oh my....."

She covered her eyes with both hands, not wanting to see my teary face. And the tears didn't stop at all. I put strength to my chin thinking I would be able to bite my lips this time, but it only did as

much as tremble so it was no good. I gave up on my willpower and just kept crying.

Then, thinking about something, she started to search for a way to stop me from crying.

"I-I know.....! Hey, please look Elaina. I made your favorite butterfly!"

Fran-sensei shaved the ice she made with Magic into the form of a butterfly and showed it to me. Even though it wasn't me who liked butterflies.

I continued to cry.

"Eh.....? It failed.....? Then, how about this? A crown made from weeds!"

Fran-sensei cut the surrounding weed with Wind Magic in one go and made a round crown. She came to put it on top of my tricorne so I avoided it with all my might.

"I-Is it no good.....? Then, how about this? Look, a fireball!"

I did not know what I wanted anymore.

"It can't be helped then..... I'll make funny faces! Please look at me, look at mee!"

I ignored her.

"Uhhhh, then..... in that case..... Ah, I know!"

After exhausting every other way, she came to embrace me.

Thinking there was nothing else she could do, this seemed to be her last resort, but the effect was immediate. My raging emotions and tears have stopped in one go.

"Funununu....."

I immediately rejected her with all my power.

"Now now. Calm down now, Elaina."

"Stop it.....! What, what are you planning.....!?"

Perhaps she thought that I was acting embarrassed. She was off mark. I rejected it because I really found it unpleasant.

However, with the power that came from god knows where, her arms coiled around me and I wasn't able to escape.

"Really, I'm sorry. It seemed I overdid a little."

".....Stop messing with me! Even though you enjoyed yourself by tormenting me, now you are acting kind? Even though you had no intention to make me a Witch from the start!"

"What..... enjoyed myself.....?"

"Please let go of me.....! I can't take this anymore, I hate everyone! The Witches of Robetta, and also you! Aren't you all the same in the end?! And you said you were different from the Witches of Robetta so I trusted you!"

"....."

"You don't even know just how hard I worked! You are scorning me by just looking at the results! Why won't anyone ever look at myself!? Even though, even though I only wanted..... to be recognized——"

The strength of hands embracing me had increased.

"I'm truly sorry, Elaina. I perfectly understood your true feelings," she said and gently brushed my hair, "You've endured it well until now."

"Didn't I say to stop it.....!? Acting like that again, are you trying to deceive me!?" My voice trembled.

"——No, I won't deceive you anymore. Lets talk about everything."

Because you see, I myself am at the limit as well——saying that, she placed her hands on my shoulders and started directly at me. Her usual smile appeared to have traces of some sorrow.

And then, she slowly opened her mouth.

"You see, I came because of a request from your parents."

## PART 3

After returning to the isolated house in the forest, Fran-sensei told me everything.

"About one month ago when I met with your parents, they came to me with large amount of money along with such a request.

‘Please give the hardest test you can to our daughter.’

I didn't understand what they were trying to say at all.

As I listened to their story, they said they were concerned about Elaina's future. If she continues on like this without learning of a failure, then when she strays from the right path one day, she could very well not get back from it.

I will say this for your parents, but please know that they did not propose this because they wanted to bully you, okay?

There was also a reason on why they came expressly to me. Your home—it is the Peaceful Country of Robetta, right? The Witches living there were intimidated by your ability. ‘I won't be able to teach someone like her,’ it seems they were saying such things. Well, as the name suggests, that country is far too peaceful, so it can be said that there aren't any Witches with real power there.....

So, anticipating that the country's Witches would reject you, they decided to come to me.

Well in a word, because you were getting ahead of yourself, they proposed to quickly teach you a lesson.

Reluctantly, I went along with their story.

And then, you came.

You did not have an impression of a mere cocky little brat unlike how your parents described it, so at first, I planned to give you an extremely difficult exam and completely break your spirit.



However, as we were together practically all the time, I noticed that you were completely different person compared to my image of you.

You are an extremely covetous person who is willing to work as much as possible in order to achieve your goal. And you have the ability to match your actions.

To the degree that you were as good as a Witch since the very start.

As I spent time with you, I gave up on the 'Letting Elaina who got carried away from nothing but success learn failure' that I initially planned. Surely, your parent's wanted to teach you that "Sometimes things don't go as planned", however they realized that it was futile.

As soon as I forced you to make a mistake, the result was visible. I was sure you would stand up to me once more without giving up: enduring your failure. I did not expect that I would break your heart.

And because of that, because I'm your teacher, I was able to discover it – your weakness.

Elaina, you are enduring everything too much.

Exactly because you understood of your youthfulness and ability well, you endured things that were more or less unreasonable.

No matter how insincere I was or how absurd my requests were, you didn't complain about them even once, right? Why was that so? Was it because you thought that you had no one else to rely on?

What did you think when Robetta's Witches rejected you? Wasn't it that you told yourself that 'It couldn't be helped'? Did you even once object to those Witches?

And so I waited, until your patience would run out. And yesterday, as I looked at your Magic, I guessed that it would come soon.

Today's exam was the end of it.

By the way, if the exam went on like I had planned and I won, and yet you still endured it without a word, I was planning to preach you about it. Because what I did was simply unreasonable.

It's no good to merely endure it all and hide your true feelings. Because, you see, one day you would have ended up falling apart.

That said, I didn't really expect you to cry.....

So you went through such painful experiences, huh. Because of you being unusually mature for your age, I completely forgot that you were still a fourteen year old girl.

So I'm truly sorry."

Then finally, Fran-sensei added this at the end.

"It's no good to endure everything. If there's something that doesn't sit right with you, then oppose it. You should learn to clearly say what you don't like. Please let your feelings out sometimes and protect yourself."

What I felt back then when I accepted those words from Sensei is something I can't recall anymore.

However, it was the first time in my life that anyone had ever said those words to me.

Do not endure.

It could be thanks to those words—that I am here now.

But well, even now, I sometimes end up accumulating a lot of stress.

## PART 4

My training under Fran-sensei lasted for one year.

After being told not to endure everything too much in the first month, the real training had finally begun.

"Good morning, Elaina. I'm feeling hungry so please make something."

"Here, have some weed."

".....Umm, what is this harassment?"

"You told me not to endure it, so I settled with my feelings that 'Making breakfast for Sensei is a pain'."

"....."

"Just kidding."

In the end, we decided to eat the bread from yesterday.

The thing about me looking like Fran-sensei's slave continued on, but taking in mind that she compensated me by teaching Magic, it wasn't all that bad.

Ehem, so I'm not enduring it, okay? it's tuition fee.

According to Fran-sensei,

"You both have skills and talent. If there's something you don't have, that would be experience."

I was told as such, so I competed with Fran-sensei many times in order to gain experience.

Those were very fulfilling days.

Those days felt so short compared to the hellish first month. Almost every day, I had special Magic training while studying Magic after returning to the forest house. It was fun, very much so.

There is one particularly memorable event from among the training sessions that Fran-sensei gave me.

This is about one time when I as usual was practicing Magic in front of the forest house.

"Elaina."

Fran-sensei said abruptly, "There's a bottle over there, right? Can you see it?"

Certainly, there were two sake bottles in the direction she was pointing.

"Yes, I can see it—but what about it?"

"Try to hit one of them with Wind Magic."

"....."

The distance to the bottle was about one tree's length.

To put it simply, it was quite easy. To the point that I thought if she was messing with me.

"Eii!"

I swung my staff and moved the wind.

With a whoosh, the ball of wind went straight at the bottle I was aiming at and hit it. The bottle flew away while spinning, and began to towards the bushes.

"I did it, so?"

However, Fran-sensei shrugged her shoulders looking somewhat disappointed.

"Did anyone say to send it flying?"

".....No, but you said to hit it, didn't you?"

"Is that okay? If you are an Apprentice Witch, then sending it flying would be counted as a success. However, for Witches, a more

reliable and accurate skill is essential."

".....Haah."

"If it was a Witch, rather than knocking the bottle down, they would instead aim for the situation where the bottle would end up in between falling and not falling. In other words, something like this——"

Fran-sensei swung her staff.

The wind produced from the staff plunged straight towards the remaining bottle and directly hit it. But the bottle didn't fall, and instead stayed standing with it's top shaking from side to side.

Fran-sensei revealed a smiled and said.

"Ah, great, it was a success..... Well for Witches, it is essential to be able to control their Magic precisely just like that. That's why making it fall down is not good."

"....."

I understood what she was trying to say, and there was also reason behind it.

However, was it really necessary for her to make me fail at it at start.....

After one year had passed since becoming her Apprentice, I became able to compete with Fran-sensei fairly well.

And just once, I was able to win against her.

That day became the final day of my training.

"There is nothing to teach you anymore," she told me with the usual smile, "You have become strong, really strong."

I still don't get why was I able to win at that time. Probably, it was just luck.

Fran-sensei took away the bellflower corsage from my chest, and

attached what was the proof of being a Witch in its place.

That was the star-shaped brooch.

"Congratulations, Elaina. The Witch of Stardust has now officially recognized you as a Witch—speaking of your Witch Name, what do you say about the Witch of Ashes?"

".....Isn't that a bit too plain?"

Did you decide it while looking at my hair color?

"Eeh? I thought it sounded really nice....."



"Speaking of which, why is Fran-sensei called the Witch of Stardust?"

"Because it sounds cool, isn't that given?"

"....."

"S-So how is it? The Witch of Ashes."

"That's fine with me." I didn't have anything against it.

"In that case, it's settled. You are the Witch of Ashes, Elaina. Please do your best from now on."

She hit my shoulders with a clap sound.

Taking a deep breath, I replied with "Yes."

While having a reminiscent talk, we returned to the isolated house in the forest and Fran-sensei immediately collected her luggage. In truth, although she called herself vagrant, she actually was the great Witch of a certain country. That was the first time I heard about it.

That's why, 'it might be quite bad that I have left the country for a whole year', she said with a smile. Although that was no laughing matter, was it.....? I was the one at fault, however.

In that case, why did she come to a place like Robetta, I thought. I tried to indirectly ask her about that, but the only reply I got was "Because there was someone I had to see by any means."

"I would very much love to take it easy some more, however I have to go now. For there are many who await me in my country."

And so, this is goodbye—Saying so, she turned her head towards where she used to chase butterflies one year ago.

"Goodbye, Sensei."

Those parting words chilled my body just like a cold wind.



"Goodbye, Elaina. I will come to visit again someday. Please look forward to it."

".....Yes!"

Then, Sensei got on her broom and ascended in the sky.

I continued to wave my hand.

Towards her silhouette slowly becoming smaller, on and on.

Until it faded within the blue sky.

At that moment, I didn't hold back my tears.

## CHAPTER 10

# THE GENTLY APPROACHING PEACEFUL DEATH

## PART 1

It was a primeval forest with tall trees lined up one by one.

Moss densely grew on the underfoot that I passed. From within the gaps of bright greenery spilled the bright sunlight, the dim light illuminating the narrow road.

I followed that road while avoiding trees by skillfully operating the broom. The lukewarm wind that accompanied the fast traveling brushed passed me as if it was licking me, and it felt really bad.

"....."

After advancing for a while, I arrived at the open space.

At that place, there was a village.

It was extremely small—so small that the whole village could be seen just from the entrance.

"Eii!"

Descending down from my broom, I sank foot in the moss-smearred ground. There didn't seem to be a gate, so after passing through the gap in fence, I easily entered the village.

There were wooden houses lined up in the village. Since they were very simple constructions made by lined up timber, there were no useless ornaments to them. They left me the impression of the houses used merely for lodging.

Well, in any case, it was a splendidly empty village.

Shall I rethink about staying here—No, in the first place, it's questionable whether there's even an establishment for staying here. Or rather, it was difficult to tell whether people really lived here to begin with. Could this place be abandoned?

As I walked aimlessly at the deserted village, one of the villagers came out of their house. Oh good, so people do live here—along

with slight feelings of relief, I directed my attention towards that villager.

It was a young man with axe on his shoulder.

".....!"

Strangely enough, when that man saw me, he opened his mouth in pure wonder. It was a reaction as if he had seen something unbelievable.

Hm.....? What happened?

He thrust his shivering finger towards me who stood puzzled, ".....Mina! Hey, aren't you Mina!" and called out to me.

Huh.....? What?

The man cast away the axe and rushed over to me.

"Thank god.....! Thank god! You found the panacea right? You made it in time right? Abel-kun will surely be pleased as well! Mina!"

"Huh? Eh? Hey, um....."

I immediately understood that he was having some kind of misunderstanding. Who in the world is Abel?

However, when I tried to ask that, he called out.

"Heey, everyone! Mina has returned!"

The strong voice, as if livening up the primeval forest, had resounded within the village in a flash. From some rustling tree, I saw the birds flying away.

The village was really small. If one raised their voice, it would surely reach everyone—and people started to appear from the all the village houses.

One after another.

Old people, children, and spouses. The villagers who saw us, as if they had conspired beforehand, have all started to run towards us

with agile and unhesitating movements.

Before I noticed it, they had surrounded me in a perfect circle. Oh no, I'm scared.

The people who bustlingly gathered mercilessly directed their pure gazes at me as if praising a hero who just returned from war. Oh no, I'm scared.

"Hey, Mina onee-chan! Did you bring back a souvenir from town?"

"Oh my, in the short time we haven't met, you have become quite a beauty."

"Didn't you shrink in size a bit?"

"Besides, what's with that getup?"

"Look, father. Aren't they the clothes that are popular in town?"

"So, did you buy panacea?"

"Now now, give her some space."

The villagers said whatever came to their head.

I can't take this anymore. As I judged it so, I detached part of my consciousness, and ignored the voices of rowdy villagers as if it was a noise.

The cheers stopped after some time.

The man who gathered the villagers yelled, "You are too noisy. Be quiet!" towards them. You are the noisiest here. Be quiet.

".....Good grief, Mina should also be tired from the long trip. She looks quite pitiful."

Oh my? What are you saying like a good person? Aren't you the ringleader here?

No, rather than that.

"Everyone, aren't you misunderstanding something?"

As it became quiet, I revealed the truth. I would be troubled if the

misunderstanding went on like this after all.

"Misunderstanding? What is?" the man said blankly. I felt the murmuring spreading within the surrounding villagers as well.

Gathering strength, I spoke indifferently.

"I'm a simple traveler. I'm not the villager Mina you all are referring to."

I intended to say it seriously, but there seemed to be few who took it as such: because of the laughs followed right after it. "What is this girl even saying?" they said.

So you won't believe me? Or should I rather use Magic and make you kneel? Judging from the conversation of the villagers, it doesn't seem like a Witch has ever visited this village before, so that should be shocking in it's own right.

Well, the final means it is.

"....."

And so.

After everyone aside from me laughed happily.

One villager spoke.

"Eh? Now that you say it, you seem even younger than Mina-san....."

Following that, the person next to him also spoke.

"Looking closely, your chest seems smaller....."

The anxiety that was born out of nowhere started to grow large.

"I thought she'd become quite a beauty in the short time I haven't seen her, but could it be....."

"No matter how you put it, it's usually impossible for someone to shrink in height....."

"Or rather, what's with this getup....."

"Granny, where's my rice?"

"No way, didn't you eat it yesterday?"

"....."

It took no time for anxiety to cover the place.

Before I knew it, the gloomy atmosphere drifted within the surrounding people as if it was a funeral.

".....Are you really not Mina?"

The man before my eyes raised a pathetic voice.

"That's what I've been saying since some time ago. That you guys are having a misunderstanding."

".....There's no way."

The man sank down on the spot.

Then, in a shaking voice,

"Can Abel-kun not be saved anymore.....?"

He said that.

What in the world is going on? In the first place, who is this Abel?

".....No wait. There's still a way."

Aside from my doubts, someone muttered from somewhere.

Several of the people surrounding me separated and regrouped at a different place.

And then, after returning back, "We want to talk to you about something so please come with us." And they said that at the same time.

Perhaps because they had so much persuasive power that I couldn't say anything, or perhaps because the faces of adults were dead serious, before I noticed, I gave them a nod.

After being led by that man and several other adults, where I arrived was the largest house of the village.

Persuading me for a meal, "Please have a seat," said the young man and he pulled out a chair for me. So I sat.

Opposite of me, only two people sat down. The left one, from my perspective, was the young man I met at the start. ....Because he became silent like an extinguished flame, he looked like a different person.

The white-bearded old man (perhaps the village head) sitting on the right crossed his hands and started to talk.

"We have well understood that you aren't Mina. Sorry about that."

"It's alright."

As long as you get it.

"However, you look so much like the girl called Mina that it confused all the villagers. So much so, you could say you are like two peas in a pod."

The young man nodded greatly.

The old man brushed his white beard and said:

"First, let us talk about our request. Miss traveler, Just one day..... no, it would be fine even for a bit. Would you pretend to be Mina?"

".....For what reason?"

It seems it has something to do with this Abel fellow, I somehow understood this fact.

"Mina had a lover. A man called Abel. A very serious and great man. For that man, we want you to pretend for a bit."

So you see.

Let's suppose the next development as well. "The life of that Abel-san is in danger, so you want me to pretend that her lover who moved to the city had returned, is that it?"



However, the old man slowly shook his head.

"No, Mina didn't move to the city or anything. She merely rushed towards the city to get the panacea."

".....I see."

That reminds me, the villagers and the young man also said such things. Asking whether I got the panacea.

"Abel is currently succumbed to the illness."

".....I see."

I urge for him to continue.

"What is eating away Abel seems to be an incurable disease—to the point that the village doctor had decided to give up on him. There was virtually no effect, no matter what medicine we administered. On the contrary, Abel's condition was only worsening. At first, he only had a mere fever, and yet he can't even properly get up now."

I see.

"And that's where panacea comes in?"

"Yes. After understanding that the village medicine was useless, Mina rushed out of the village saying 'I'm going to get the panacea.'"

"And where did she want to obtain that panacea?"

"If you advance far north from here, there is a large country. There was a rumor that panacea could be obtained there. However, to reach that country, you have to walk for two whole days. There was no one in this village who could ascertain the truth."

"Relying on that uncertain information, Mina-san rushed out of the village, you say?"

"She probably bet on the chance that it was real. Her feelings of wanting to save Abel were strong to that point—however."

The young man followed up on those words.

While powerlessly hanging his head.

"But it's been two weeks even since she left. Mina—my daughter—should have returned long ago, but she still hasn't."

.....Daughter?

So she's your daughter?

"Eh, so you were her father huh?"

It was a shocking truth. The young man silently nodded.

Isn't it really bad to be confusing your own daughter with a complete stranger? —No, I guess he was exhausted to that point.

"The more time goes by, the closer Abel approaches death," the old man said, "According to the village doctor's words, he can only last three more days."

Three more days.

Would Mina-san return I wonder?

Arriving to the country that has panacea needs two days. And buying the medicine and returning back takes two more days. And yet, two weeks have passed.

To be late with return by over ten days, it is certainly far too long. I can only think of some trouble coming up—or perhaps...

Will Mina-san make it within the verdict of remaining time. No, the two before me already understood something.

Mina-san will surely not come back anymore—

"Abel has been earnestly fighting with the disease until now. And yet—wouldn't it be too sorrowful for him to die without meeting with his loved one who was always beside him like a family member?"

"....."

"Ever since he lost family when he was a child, Mina-san was the only person he relied on. Mina is the only one who can save his

spirit."

Even a fake would be fine—I want for him to feel happiness at least in his final moments.

The old man said.

## PART 2

While I didn't immediately agree, I still went with the old man's proposal.

There were no risks for me, and I would be a terrible person if I refused him there.

Be that as it may, I am a traveler. I don't want to spend a whole day in this village where there is not even an inn on top of it having no characteristics. If possible, I would want to fly on my broom towards that country which is said to have that panacea at once.

So I gave my conditions.

"I will cooperate. However, it will be just one time. Once I meet with Abel-san, I'm immediately departing on my journey."

The two of them replied that it would still be fine.

After settling that, it was followed by immediate preparations.

There were several women waiting for me who were led from that large house to another one. Their ages were different, from younger girls to older women.

The oldest granny among them seemed to be the one who managed that place. While showing the wrinkles on her face, she said, "Now, let's prepare. All men get out!"

And, with a violent strike of her staff, all the men who came to watch including the old man and Mina-san's father were kicked out of the room by women.

But the way, although I said staff, It wasn't like the Magic Staff that I have, but rather the one that you use as a third leg.

The granny, who closed the door and blocked it with the pole to make sure no one entered, sent the eye signal towards other women. And immediately following it, every woman aside from me

started to act and started to close the curtains and the backdoor of the house.

Then, in the house that became dim, the granny approached me from the front.

"Now strip."

The granny suddenly grasped my robe.

"Eh?"

"Remove your strange outfit at once! If you wear such thing, Abel will immediately notice it!"

Ah, so it was that. My heart skipped a beat.

After removing the brooch that was the proof of being a Witch from the robe and grasping it in hand, I stripped everything I wore except the underwear. One very young girl received my clothes and she gently folded them on the side.

"Now, put this on."

The women who received the pack from granny walked towards me in quick steps and took out the clothing from within it. "Now everyone. I'm going to put this on miss traveler, so lend a hand."

Eeh? I can put it on by myself you know?

However, before I returned the words to her, several women were already surrounding me, and I once again closed my open mouth from their indescribable pressure.

And it turned into me acting as a dress-up doll.

"Okay, raise your leg."

"Will sleeves pass in this blouse I wonder? Oh, the size doesn't fit."

"However, she looks so much like Mina-chan."

"She's even prettier than Mina-chan isn't she?"

"Yes."

"What would be okay for the ribbon color? It should be red after all, huh."

For some reason, everyone was motivated. They were having a lot of fun.

When I gazed down after dressing was mostly over, I wore a dark brown flare skirt on white blouse.

Although I could have managed this much by myself.....

"Then for the finishing touches—it will be a little painful, but endure it, okay?"

As the woman behind me said those words in a refreshing tone, she wrapped something black around me.

".....?"

As I wondered what it was, it turned out to be a corset. I was wrapped in a corset before I noticed.

"Eh, hey, wai—"

Ignoring me who had become bewildered from the sudden development, the surrounding girls took hold of me, and forcefully pulled the string on my back.

Before long, I felt as if I was being crushed around the stomach.

"I-It hurts! It hurts! Even if you want to tighten it, at least do it more gently!"

"Ah, hey. Stop struggling."

"Endure it, endure it."

"You'll get used to it in a bit."

"Traveler Onee-san. Hang in there."

Like this.

While everyone aside me was engulfed in a harmonious mood, the dressing operation had finished.

After that, the granny presented a bundle of pads with serious face, saying, "Your chest is lacking, so won't you wear some pads?" so I threw them on the ground.





## PART 3

There was a hut just out of the village.

As if it wasn't tended at all, the knee-high grass was noisily being crushed as I walked.

Compared to the houses that were gathered together, this hut looked old, and walls so thin that it would probably make a hole if you hit it.

Rather than a house for living, it instead looked like a storage room for items one doesn't usually use.

I was told Abel-san was isolated here.

Abel-san suddenly fell to an illness on day. It was unknown for the villagers whether that illness was infectious or not. That's why, in order to decrease the possibility of infection as much as possible, they confined him in this hut.

It appeared it was Mina-san and her father who were helping him. It seems that at first, Mina-san being his lover, had nursed him from day to night, however, as his condition worsened, she rushed out of the village.

Could it be that she just ran away, it seems there were also villagers who thought so.

Whether that was true or not is not known.

After taking a deep breath in front of the hut, I opened the door. It made a ear-hurting sound.

"....."

Entering inside, I closed the door from behind.

A man was lying on the bed. He was a young man with black hair. Without a doubt, he had looked very handsome when he was still healthy—but there was not a trace of it now. And now, the man

who looked at me with vacant eyes had no light in his eyes and his cheeks were all loosened.

".....Mina?"

His weakly moving lips have uttered the name of his loved one.

"Yes. It's me. Have you been well?"

I told a lie.

As I walked while making the floor give out creaks, I sat down on the chair next to the bed. He faintly laughed.

"So you returned..... I thought you'd never come back again."

"I'm your lover, right? Isn't it given that I would return at all costs?"

".....That's right, huh."

He directed his gaze outside of the window.

There wasn't anything there. But only thick weeds and the primeval forest seen afar.

Not just the outward appearance, but as if it really was completely tattered, the draft that got in from somewhere had shook his hair.

"I found the panacea."

Then I said so.

Just like reading a prepared manuscript.

"I will bring panacea together with today's dinner, so please take one pill after filling your stomach. It might take time, but you will surely get well."

Of course, that was a lie.

This was the proposal from Mina-san's father. If Mina-san returned, it would look strange if she didn't bring the panacea with her. That's why pretending as if she had obtained the medicine would give him a peace of mind.

The contents of the medicine they would give him with food are actually sleeping pills.

What the villagers planned to do with him after letting him talk with his loved one—I didn't ask. No, rather, I guess I should say that it didn't even require asking.

"Hey, Mina." The man looked in my eyes. "Can you hold...my hand?"

With difficult movements, he pulled his hand out of the futon. It by no means looked like a muscled hand befitting of a youth, but instead it was a hand that was withered to the bones.

I must not waver—immediately, I grasped his hand with both of mine. It had grown so cold as if there was no blood flowing in it at all.

"It's warm."

It's proof that my heart is growing cold—He said so.

And then,

"Hey, Mina." He, once again, called out the name of his beloved. "Won't you kiss me?"

"Eh, kiss you say?"

I unintentionally returned the question back. And, I immediately regretted it.

".....That's right, a kiss. You don't want do?" I felt like there was a grain of suspicion floating in his eyes.

And I thought. Thought and thought.

What should I do? Of course, if it's a lover, then kiss is only natural thing to do, but I'm— Ahh, he'd notice if I hesitate for too long. What to do, what to do.....

As I was locked up in maze with no answer, he looked at me with a smile.

And giggled.

"My bad. I was just joking. Please don't worry about it."

Somehow, it looked as if he had regained his vitality even if only a bit.

Then, he said,

"I'm not seriously going to pester a girl who's not my lover to kiss me," and showed a wide smile.

Did my acting get exposed because of my carelessness? Thinking so, I denied it many times in fluster, but his belief was firm. "You aren't real Mina. You don't have to force yourself," he said.

Still, towards me who tried to keep acting in spite of it, he uttered words filled with confidence.

"In the first place, there's no way Mina would ever return to me. What a fool."

I did not know towards who were those words directed at.

It appears there were different circumstances—I gave up on Mina-san act, and revealed everything about me.

That I was a traveler. That I was a Witch. And that I was requested to act as Mina-san since I looked like here. I told him all that, without hiding anything.

He said while pondering:

"You certainly do look exactly like Mina."

"Is it really that much?"

"Yeah. You could say you are like two peas in a pod."

That said, he continued. "What's a Witch?"

"So the villagers here don't know about Witches huh."

"That's right. First time hearing it."

Well, it certainly is a remote village two days away from the nearest country, so I guess it's not too unnatural for them to not know about Witches.

I politely explained, while taking out my staff and demonstrating Magic to make it simpler.

"Amazing.....! Hahaa, so there are such people in the world!"

Albel-san laughed with all his might. His dry laughter that forcibly made his stomach move, before long turned into coughs.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry. I became a little too excited—And so, about me and Mina..."

".....Yes. What is the matter? The thing about not returning back."

And so he said, looking up at the ceiling:

"I'm the one who made up the story about panacea. Something like that doesn't exist."

"Doesn't..... exist?"

He gave a nod.

"Mina, you see—"

Then, he quietly began to talk.

She was a girl so kind, so lovely that she was too good for me. She was my only support.

Even after I fell to the illness, she nursed me without once looking troubled. Every day she came to my room, and fed me her handmade cooking, and brought me books to not get bored while being bedridden. Staying next to my side until I fell asleep.

I was saved by her who nursed me with all her power.

However my illness just kept worsening. No matter how long I

kept taking the medicine or how much I slept. Before long, I couldn't even eat properly. And even when looking at the food that she brought to me, the sense of it looking delicious had also disappeared. But instead, I only felt nausea.

Probably, I didn't have much time left.

I somehow understood that fact.

However, she encouraged me with all her might. That appearance of hers was just lovely. I wished that she would live in happiness.

Then, one day, I told her, "The village medicine is useless against my illness. It won't make me better. You know that there's a large country to the north two days walk from here right? I heard that there's an all-curing medicine there. If it's not much trouble, can you go and bring it?"

Mina was bewildered.

Does such medicine really exist, she said. Besides, you will definitely get better if you do your best, she said.

But I ignored her words. And on top of ignoring them, I pushed large amount of money I was secretly saving up for going on a trip with her in future, along with one letter.

"This much should be enough to buy it. Take it. And until you obtain the panacea, never return—and if you can't obtain the panacea no matter what and be at loss, open that letter."

And said that.

Mina was truly a good girl.

After a lot and lot of worry, she finally agreed to my proposal.

"I will definitely, absolutely find it and come back," she said.

Even though such medicine doesn't exist.

My environment changed from the next day. Because Mina went to obtain the panacea, the fact about my illness not improving had

spread among the village. The villagers who wondered whether my disease was infectious appeared, and you can see the result.

I was isolated. And only Mina's father started to take care of me. But I thought it was fine nonetheless.

—You see I, love Mina with all my heart. So much that it's unbearable.

Being separated from her was, as expected, painful. But causing her to be sad was even more painful. I didn't want her to grieve over my corpse. I wished for her to remain smiling.

For that reason, I decided to drive her away from the village.

"It's better if you don't come to see me again." If I rejected her with such words, there's no way she would obediently agree to it. That much, I understood. But even if I still rejected her and made sure she wouldn't return to me, she would surely be sad nevertheless. On the contrary, there was also the possibility of other villagers butting in our problem.

Above all.

I didn't think that she would truly be happy in a village where my dead body lied. It might be presumptuous, me being conceited, but I thought she might be dragging me along too much. but wasn't she pulling me along with her, I thought.

She would surely arrive at that country after two days. And would start searching for panacea there. But no matter how many days and hours she walked throughout the country, she would naturally still not find it.

Then, she would open the letter.

That letter is filled with all my feelings—and I thought that when Mira finally read that letter, I would already be dead. I hope that you would find happiness in that country. I wrote that in it.

After all, in that big country where she headed to, there must be a

great man somewhere who will heal her wounds. There should be someone, who will make her smile once again.

Isn't it pretty selfish talk? However, since the start I had thought that this cramped village didn't suit her, and that she had to see a world much more vast.

By the way.

Since miss traveler was acting like Mina, that means she still hasn't returned, right? Even though it should already be about two weeks since she left.

In that case, it must be like that.

—She surely found happiness there.

At the end of his story, he looked outside the window with worn-out eyes. Just absentmindedly.

The wind blew, the tree leaves danced, and before long disappeared from view.

"And you are really fine with that?"

Those were some common words. But I couldn't find any other words to offer him.

"Of course I'm not. Parting with your loved one is a sorrowful thing."

"....."

In that case – I started, but stopped.

For both Mina-san and Abel-san, the parting would be just as sad. But she must overcome that sadness—This was the result of thinking what to do for that.

An outsider shouldn't butt in the problem of these two and two alone.

"I'm glad that I met you, miss traveler. Albeit not real, I was able to



meet with her once more."

".....I also think that meeting with you was nice."

Glad to hear it—After muttering so, he said:

"Miss traveler, miss traveler Witch. If you are a Witch, that means you can use miraculous power that we aren't able to, is that right?"

"Hm? Eh. Well, that's correct."

I was a little surprised from the sudden question, but affirmed it.

Magic, after all, is not something available to anyone.

The Magic you showed me some time ago was absolutely amazing. It was as if I was in a dream world."

"Why thank you. I'm glad that you enjoyed it."

"Hey, can you do something like this with Magic? Like for example—"

## PART 4

Immediately after leaving the hut, I returned to the house for changing clothes and had the corset removed. It was too tightly fastened around my back, so I couldn't remove it by myself.

"Did it go smoothly?"

The granny asked to me as I changed back to my robe. I answered something that didn't happen.

"Yes. He was under the impression that I was Mina-san to the end."

"That's a relief. Meeting with Mina at his final moment should've surely brought him happiness as well."

"....."

His final moments..... you say?

"So, how is Abel-san now?"

"He told me he wanted to sleep because we talked for a long time. Please leave him be until the night."

"I see... Understood. I will convey that to the village head as well."

The village head should be the old man with white moustache. "If you would."

Attaching my star-shaped brooch and putting on a tricorne, I finished changing. I returned back to my usual self.

"What are you going to do from now on? If you plan to stay in village, we have space....."

It was a pleasant proposal. However, I shook my head.

"No. I'm departing from this village soon. I have to hurry ahead."

Besides, I want to see that large country for myself.

".....That's a shame."

"Sorry for that."

"Will you go without meeting with the village head as well?"

"I might be detained here if I do, right? That's why I'll vanish like this. Give my regards to the village head and Mina-san's father when you see them."

So you are going already. It's a shame. Come again sometime.

The women who helped me remove the corsage said those words at the same time.

And I,

"Yes, I'll surely visit again."

Said something I didn't plan to do.

And so, I left the village.

Within the primeval forest, I flew north. I simply looked straight ahead, without once turning back.

It felt that the sensation of Abel-san's cold hand was still remaining on my hands that were grasping the broom.

He—

## PART 5

".....Are you seriously saying that?"

Hearing his proposal, I was greatly perplexed.

"That's right, I'm serious. ....I'm going to die soon. I'll surely die very soon. And that is scary and unbearable. Every day, I think that if I sleep today, maybe I won't wake up again. I am afraid, scared, I can not help it."

He continued as he lied on bed.

"Besides, I know. That Mina's father and villagers think of me as nuisance. Deep down, they wish for my death. They are thinking that if I die faster, the need to take care of me would disappear. That's why I'm done. It's my limit. That's why—won't you answer my request? Won't you kill me?"

He wasn't joking.

He said that with full seriousness.

So he was already at a limit huh.

However.

"I refuse."

There is no way I would accept such request. I did not become a Witch in order to kill people.

Even if that was his final request—for me, it would be impossible.

".....It's a shame."

He became quiet.

As if he didn't expect it from the beginning.

"I'm sorry."

"No, you don't have to apologize—at any rate, even if I don't die

by your hand, I will still be killed by the villagers sometime tonight. They will kill me by putting poison in my food or something, and pretend that I passed on peacefully.”

".....Such a thing."

"No, I get it. I won't be able to stand up anymore, and someone who's just lying on bed is worthless to this village. There's nothing left at this point but waiting for death."

"....."

"Even so, the reason I lived to this day was because the villagers hoped that Mina would return. They seemed to be under the impression that I still had lingering feelings for her—but that is no more."

So that means,

".....Is it because I came here?"

"It's not like I'm blaming you, so don't get the wrong idea, okay? Ending up like this someday was my fate."

"....."

And then, he smiled.

"Well, if I had to speak of my desire, I wanted to die while being taken care by a girl that looks like Mina—but I don't want to insist on it. Sorry for asking such a strange thing of you."

"No, please don't mind it——"

I said so.

## CHAPTER 11

# THE COUNTRY THAT OPPRESSED THE UGLIES

## PART 1

It was a straight road with trees of similar height on both sides. There was no pavement or such, it was simply an uneven ground where trees weren't growing stretching ahead.

Above it was a girl flying on the broom. Back where she had passed by, the trees whispered whilst shaking branches, throwing leaves as if raise a toast of something.

That lovely girl was both a Witch and a traveler.

Her ashen hair received the sunlight and reflected it dazzlingly, and her azure eyes didn't look at the road ahead, but instead seemed to be gazing somewhere afar. It wouldn't an exaggeration to say that her Witch-like appearance of black robe and tricorne and a star-shaped brooch existed for the purpose of enhancing her charms.

Who in the world was that girl that anyone and everyone would only describe as lovely?

Right, it's me.

"....."

I already got the information about the country up ahead.

Such as that among the merchants that do their business around it, they have come to call it with strange names such as "Big yet small Country", "Country with just handsome guys and beauties", "Country with walls", "Worn out Country", "Somewhat hard to enter Country" and "Country of every strangeness". I wanted to say, at least make them more compatible to each other.

At any rate, the only thing certain about the country up ahead is that it is abnormal. Maybe there's something strange in it, or maybe mysterious. I didn't discover anything regarding that when listening to the merchants.

Anyway, if I want to learn about that country, then I have no choice to ascertain it with my own eyes.

I started to look forward to it a bit.

In a short while after that, I saw the country. Along with it having not high walls as I expected, its gate, made from wood, was open.

I descended in front of it.

Thereupon, the gate guard promptly approached from nearby and bowed.

"Why hello—oh, a Witch-sama? Now that's unusual." Looking at the brooch on my chest, the gate guard widened his eyes. "What business do you have to come here?"

"I'm a traveler."

"Hohou. That's also quite rare."

"Is that so?"

The gate guard nodded two, no three times.

"Yes—By the way, Witch-sama, are you aware of this country?"

"Well, more or less..."

"Is that so? It's alright in that case."

".....?"

Oh my, what?

Did he want to say something, this is puzzling.

"Well then, Witch-sama, please answer these simple questions to enter the country. First—"

Cutting off my meager doubt were the usual questions. Such as where I heard about it, or my name. My age. The duration of stay and the journey purpose.

I simply answered them all.



"Understood. Well then, go ahead."

"Alright~"

While urged by the gate guard, I set foot towards the country.

Now, what kind of country will this be?

## PART 2

It was impossible to judge whether or not the country was reputable just through a bit of walking.

Passing through the gate, the country inside was spreading a relatively usual sight, with no particular change in appearance.

It's just, rather than a country, I feel that calling it a village surrounded by walls would be more suitable instead.

This country had way too many wooden buildings, after all. Every house you looked appeared as if it was made by carving out the trees. Perhaps they were houses made by cutting the trees that grew on that road that I followed. Furthermore, every house was completely wrecked up. They were tattered in a way that gave off a feeling as if an evil wolf targeted them from front and blew them away.

By the way, the ones living inside weren't pigs..... but actual humans. Well, that should be natural.

Coming out of one of the houses was a woman, slender like a thread. The woman who came out with a basket under her arm shifted her attention to me just for an instant, and headed somewhere without change.

That reaction was one that you would direct towards an object of no interest.

Perhaps it's not so unusual for travelers to come here.

Not only the women who had a basket, but the reaction of the people of the country was really indifferent.

Rather than indifferent, I guess normal fits better.

For example, a woman who put a stick between two trees in the garden and was drying laundry there. Or the guys who had a

friendly chat while surrounding and sticking branches in a faintly burning bonfire. Or maybe the youth who was wholeheartedly cutting up the firewood with axe.

I was able to look at the country residents from afar, but whenever our eyes met, "Ah, a traveler? I see." They immediately averted their eyes in that manner.

And now that you mention it, I feel like there are only beautiful boys and girls here, and it can also be said that it's worn out. But at the moment, the only thought I held about it was a "Normal to the point of boring country". I have to disagree with it being reputable.

"Oh my. This is rare."

As I absentmindedly walked, someone called out to me.

As I turn my face towards the voice, I saw a magician walking up to me. As our eyes met, she made a bright smile.

It was a smile overflowing with enigmatic tenderness. It was apparent, but her age seemed to be about the same as my parents.

Just in case, as I turned my head, I made sure that it wasn't some sort of embarrassing misunderstanding, "Do you mean me?"

And so I asked.

The woman nodded. "Yes, you. You are a traveler right? It's quite strange to be coming to this country."

"Is that so?"

"That's right."

"I heard that this country was different so it caught my eye."

"Hmm, you sure are an oddball."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

For some reason, I ended up in a friendly chat with this sudden Magician, and was treated as an oddball with strange tastes.

What is this? I don't get the reason.

"However, I can't see anything too unusual. I can't think of anything but absolutely, completely normal country."

"By the way, I wonder if you heard what kind of country this was?"

"Uhhhm....."

I told her of the nicknames that the merchants have been calling this country.

".....Hmm. Country with only beauties huh..... ufufu. I feel embarrassed."

"....."

Did she just pick out the good part?

This Magician,

"Then, are you feeling disappointed that it ended up being too normal despite your expectations?"

"Well, yes. Something like that."

".....I see. In that case, you should come see the country from the inside. Perhaps you will discover what you were expecting."

"Inside of the country.....? What do you mean?"

"Just like it sounds. Come here for a bit."

"Eh, w-wai—"

Pulling my sleeve, I was dragged along by the Magician whose even name I didn't know.

.....Why?

The place I was dragged to was the front of the gate.

Not the gate we passed when entering the country, but a more extravagant one. On top of a wooden gate, iron frames were added to it. Deep down, I felt that it was taller than the castle walls as well as the other one I saw when I entered.

The gate was open and the cart was stopped near it. Packages of various sizes were carried by overweight old men from the cart which was attached to the horse that was plucking grass in a bored manner.

Now, what could this be?

".....Is there another country inside a country?"

With my question, the Magician let go of my sleeve and said: "Yes. What's more, beyond this gate is the real country."

"Huh? In that case, what is this side?" I pointed at the ground.

"I will tell you if you hear what I have to say."

"....."

I have a bad feeling about this.

"Won't you do a trade with me?"

"A trade you say?"

"That's right."

"Depends on what it is."

As I said so, the Magician's eyes sparkled as if saying "I've got it!"

"A request to go and buy a book. I will pass you the money."

".....Book?" As I thought about what it could be, it turned out to be a normal thing. "Won't you be able to buy it yourself? Or are there circumstances that prevent you doing so?"

"That's right. I can't buy it due to circumstances. Can I entrust it to you?"

When I asked what was it about, she clearly dodged it by saying

"That, let's leave it to after you buy it, okay?"

Well, it fine as long as it's at the level of an errand.

I didn't feel like becoming the Magician's errand girl, but I was really curious about the other side of the gate.

"I will take up the request."

I said.

## PART 3

Slipping by the listless horse and the working oily old man, I passed through the second gate.

And what awaited there was a different world.

The state was different to the point that I became wanting to say what in the world was that worn down place until now.

The ground on which I walked was not a ground that's is not even paved—rather it was made from what looked like hard rust-colored bricks lined up in a fixed manner. No, rather than hard-looking, it was really hard.

Even the houses that followed along the slightly winding road were upgraded from wooden to bricks. With this, it should be fine even if the wolf attacked.

As I walked, the the aroma of coffee came from somewhere. There was a coffee shop—And every person from inside of it was smiling while looking towards me.

As I walked on, I even found my favorite bakery. There didn't seem to be stalls in this country, so there were no people doing business by the road. Bakery-san was also opened up inside a pretty ordinary house.

Because of the good fragrance assaulting my body, my stomach raised a growl as if it came to a realization. That reminds me, I haven't eaten anything since the morning.

But let's eat after doing a quick round of the country. It's a good chance, so I want to eat this country's specialties.

"Hey hey, mommy. one of the uglies is walking. Despite being ugly."

"Shh! Don't look."

.....

.....Oh my.

What was that just now.

As I looked towards the direction where that absolutely rude remark came from, I saw fat parent and child holding hands while looking towards me with disgusted expression.

Did they just say that about me? The moment I met eyes with those child and parent that were moving away, "Hyaa, the ugly glared at me!"

"Hey, stop it! You'll be turned ugly!"

They followed up with such words.

.....

What in the world just occurred?

Even if I thought deeply over it, there would be no answer to it, so in the end, I concluded in my mind that it was just my misunderstanding.

The more I advanced, the more it grew.

Or perhaps, the more people I passed by, the more numerous the unpleasant eyes directed at me grew.

People, at times pointing and scorning at me and at times whispering to each other, have said: Ugly.

"Goodness! Such ugliness!"

"Such a terrible face. It's something unable to look at."

"How can she even walk so calmly? I feel respect."

"She's too slender, huh."

"She's like a skeleton."

"It's bad for the kids' education, so why won't she just disappear."

"What's more, a Witch."



"Aah, that's right. it's an ugly Witch."

And so, something like that.

As expected, I wouldn't become angry when it's this plain.

Oh me, oh my? Could this be jealousy? I became wanting to say such things.

However, after walking around a place with such plain discrimination as this, it's natural that something troublesome would happened.

For example, being laughed by a man (that looked like fat pig), saying, "Hyahahaha! Too ugly! She's just like a slave!"

Or making an old man (that looked like a fat pig) frightened, saying, "Hiii! It's a death god! Does this mean that my death is drawing near.....?"

Or being thrown rocks at by kids (that look like fat pigs) saying "Go away you ugly!"—Although their power was weak compared to their physique so avoiding them was easy.

Incidentally, in order to reduce my stress, I blew away the kids who threw those rocks with wind, but they had fat on their bodies so there should be no problem.

But even if I do a bit of revenge, the inconvenient incidents wouldn't end.

"Hey, you are a hindrance! step aside, ugly."

Neither would the words uttered at me when passing by me and hitting my shoulders.

Now, just how beautiful is the person who ascertained me as ugly? Turning away with that thought, waiting there was a meat-like woman.

Oh, such lovely meat. Just like a pig before shipping it away.

To express it in different words, it was an overly fat Ojousama

with an overly crude face. That round girl, wearing a fluttering dress on her body, was walking in the middle of the road while displaying a proud face.

But for some reason, she was bathed in cheers.

"Oh how beautiful!"

"The girls should be like that after all."

"Isn't she a bit overweight?"

"It's fine that way. You don't get it huh."

"What a beauty..... I want her to be my bride."

"Compared to her, what's with that Witch?"

"She's all bones."

"She's too slender."

Something like that.

It was very unpleasant that the flames somehow reached to me.

".....Fuuh."

For the time being, I turned around the way I came from, and rushed towards the coffee shop.

I escaped. Because it was too unpleasant.

"Welcome. Your order? .....pff." The dog-faced man (which was the very fatness itself) said so with a disgusting smile on his face.

"Umm, how about the morning set."

I chose the topmost thing on the menu. I choose the cheapest thing.

"As you request."

The employee quickly went away and started to whisper something with another employee.

Well, they should be ridiculing my appearance.

"....."

Needless to think, needless to say.

Apparently in this country – the other side of the gate seems to be a place where the concept of 'ugly' is far from ordinary.

"Hey look..... the ugly is sitting there."

"You fool! Don't talk so easily about the ugly ones. You'll get infected!"

"D-Damnit! .....My bad."

"Good grief....."

Putting aside whether ugliness was infectious, it seems that even inside the coffee shop, the other customers were showering me with piercing glares.

I don't really get it, but it seems that I somehow belong to the objects of discrimination in this country.

"Thank you for waiting. Here's your morning set."

The employee that looked at me as if belittling left behind a coffee and a bread. And also jam.

A very modest amount. As expected from the cheapest thing.

Then, while displaying an unpleasant smile, the employee said, "Ms. customer, I'm sorry but could you leave the shop quickly after eating this? We're getting complaints from other customers....."

"Alright....."

The laughter leaked out from some seat.

After eating the morning set extremely slowly and elegantly, I headed towards the bookstore.

I wanted to promptly escaped from here, but I can't because I

made a promise.

Reluctantly, as I walked while being pointed and laughed at, I finally arrived to the bookstore.

The inside of the bookstore was engulfed in silence. As expected of the sacred place of ladies and gentlemen. The people inside (All fat without exception) were engulfed in bookshelves, or perhaps in the books they held in hand, so they didn't start looking towards me.

So this is a safety zone.

"Lets see....." I loitered inside the store while recalling the book title requested by the Magician.

After a while, I finally found it. It was stacked in the corner of new books.

Taking one copy in hand, I went towards the counter.

"Weeelcome." The shop assistant that gave off unserious feeling accepted the book. "Shall I wrap it?"

"Please do."

She didn't take a blatant attitude, but she might be laughing deep down.

As I leisurely moved my eyes away, I saw the bookmarks of books with bad taste piled up on the counter.

They were crushed and flattened spider husks that were disgusting to even look at. They had "Bookmarks" written on them so they must be one. There is no doubt.

"Ah, could you put one of these bookmarks into the book every fifty pages?"

"Customer has a bad taste, eh."

Then why are you even selling those bookmarks.

When I left the store, I was surrounded by the adults.

I don't know what I'm saying, but I myself didn't understand what had occurred.

Surrounding me were the fat gentleman I remembered.

"Hey, you are the traveler who slipped in this country aren't you?"

The oily fat man spoke towards me. As I recalled who it was, it turned out to be the guy that was carrying down the luggage from the cart near the second gate.

"What do you mean by slipped in?"

I frankly said.

"You secretly entered while we gate guards were carrying the luggage didn't you. It's a misdeed to enter this country while knowing that uglies aren't allowed."

"What?" I shouldn't have entered?

"Don't play dumb. When you passed the first gate, the guard of that side should have given you the explanation. That the second gate is a special location where only select few can enter. Still entering in spite of that is extremely bad deed."

"Haah."

Now that I think about it, I think the gate guard asked me whether I knew of the country or not.

"What's with your attitude!? In the first place, it will make the citizens troubled if someone like you stays here. Get out at once!"

"I intended to do just that even without you telling me."

I already finished my business here.

".....Hmph, and don't come back."

I don't plant to come back even without you telling me that so relax. I wanted to say that.

But I'm not stupid enough to add oil to the fire so I just replied with "Is that so~".

## PART 4

"Oh my. So you finally returned."

It was the worn out place outside the prospering country.

She stood before the second gate as I left it. It was good that it saved the trouble of searching her, but I think that my timing to go meet her was predicted somehow.

It was as if I was dancing on her palm all this time.

It's probably just my imagination.

"Hello. I obtained the promised item."

"Oh. Thank you."

She tried to take the book from my hands.

"But before that, won't you let me hear about this country? Handing the book over comes after that." I said while raising up the book.

She drew back her extended hands, and said,

"That's right—then, shall we go sit somewhere?"

So the place I was led to was a bench that didn't have any life in it. It seemed to have been neglected outside for a long time, as it had moss twined around its legs, and the wood on it also had holes here and there.

It gave of a cracking sound as we sat. It was a little scary. It felt like the plank would break with a 'Baam!' any time now.

Opposite to me whose heart was pounding as if holding a time bomb, the Magician gazed calmly at the tranquil scenery and spoke.

"Compared to the other side, it feels good here. It's calm."

".....Well, that's true."

Though I wonder if it isn't a bit too calm.

"So, what do you want to hear?"

"You know what I want to hear, don't you?"

The Magician, for a short while, became silent.

Then, she started to speak bit by bit.

"—You see, in old times, when this country was yet undivided, there lived one really ugly princess."

"Huh? Ugly princess you say?"

I inclined my head. With the meaning of "What do you mean?"

"Well, she would be a beauty by the standard of that other side—well, in short, it was a princess that would be ugly by your standards."

"That was pretty harsh."

"But it's true."

"....."

"Let's return to the topic—that ugly princess was self-conscious about her own ugliness. At that time, the general idea of a 'beauty' was still normal, so she didn't have self-confidence in her appearance."

Fumu Fumu.....?

The Magician continued the talk.

"That's why, the princess asked one traveler Witch. "Make my appearance beautiful". However the Witch refused. She didn't know of a Magic that could tamper with person's looks, and she also thought that it wasn't right thing to do ethically."

"Was that traveler Witch you?"

However, she shook her head. "No. I'm but a mere Magician. Look, I don't even have a brooch, right?"

Saying so, she pulled the chest of her robe and showed me. There wasn't anything there for sure.

"Then, how do you know of the request that the princess gave to that traveler Witch?"

"Because I'm the friend of that Witch—we got to know each other when she came to this country. But she is a traveler, and we were together only for a little time."

"Haah."

"Both mine and her age were exactly the same as yours, and our appearances were also just like yours. We were absolutely bright and beautiful."

"Haah....."

Was she admiring me? I don't understand.

"Well, anyway, the traveler Witch turned town the princess' request. It seems that she was quite persistent and eventually even turned into a quarrel. Then, the angry princess exiled the traveler Witch from the country saying "You have some nerve to deny my request"."

"By the way, I was just exiled as well."

"I thought as such."

"....."

It seems she used me despite knowing how it would all end up.

"Then, the princess reversed the concept of ugly and beautiful and drew away everyone who was ugly from her perspective outside of the gate. And thus, the princess lived in harmony. And they all lived happily ever after."

"....."

"How was it?"

"No well, even if you ask how....."



It somehow became a headache.

For now, let's ask what I want to ask.

"However, was that okay? All of you were driven away from the gate, right? I don't think it would be strange if dissatisfied people appeared from there."

"And they appeared of course. Although there wasn't anyone who thought of revolt."

"Is that so?"

"The dissatisfied people grabbed a large sum from the country and left from this place. Right now, they are starting their lives from scratch at some other place I guess? Can't say that it's a wise idea though. If you want to leave in comfort, then staying in this place would be the best choice—You get minimum amount of money and food without even working after all. This side is seems poor, but it's actually the other side that's poor."

"....."

"Thanks to the bad-looking princess who forced her sense of values, we are all living peaceful and ordinary lives. On the other side as well, the people are living a life with no discomfort—and by scorning at people like us, they vent their daily stress.

".....Yeah."

I see.

Looking from the other side, the people here are depraved existences that make them think "I don't want to become like that".

So, by mutually keeping the existences lower than themselves on the other side of the gate, they are maintaining the peace, that should be it.

It's skillful, or maybe poor, or indirect.

"—Well, my talk is done with this. How was it? Did it answer all your questions?" She held her hand out to me.

I said while putting the book I bought in her hand.

"Yes, more or less. My questions are done." Although I'm still stressed. "By the way, why did you want this book?"

"This is a new edition book, but they don't really distribute it here from the other side of the wall that. So I thought I'd use miss traveler."

"....."

I see.

I was used with quite worthless reason.

"Well, you got to know the other side, it's fine, right?"

"That's right huh—although I got somewhat angry while getting openly discriminated on the other side.

"Oh..... sorry about that." She honestly apologized.

"Don't mind it."

I already inserted my small revenge once every fifty pages.

"What did you think after traveling this country?"

Suddenly she asked while opening the book.

The two in one countries, they were really peaceful yet with really strange relationships. If I had to express it in a word.

"I think it's a strange country."

I guess that word would sum it up.

And she,

"That's also what I think."

Said so and turned over the page.

CHAPTER 12

THE PRINCESS OF A COUNTRY WITHOUT  
PEOPLE

## PART 1

If you follow this map, you'll be able to arrive to the nearest country. Do your best, Ojousan.

The chief of the village where I stayed the other day gave me a map while saying such words, so I decided to obediently follow it.

It's been a half day since I've been flying on my broom at low altitude, barely above the ground while holding that map in hand. Certainly, I was able to reach my goal without a hitch.

I was able to, however...

Good grief, just what is this.

"....."

Isn't it all wrecked?

It's..... not a country is it?

Anything and everything. All things were dead. The gate that separated country from the outside was also left open, so I was able to pass under it without stopping while on my broom.

The scenery inside the country stayed unchanged. Houses without roofs, what were once houses burnt to the ground, houses with just outlines remaining, houses that turned to a mere debris... debris, debris, and more debris.

As for people, there was not even a sign of life.

It seems that this country had been deserted by people long time ago.

And while the Royal Palace that could be said to be the symbol of this country was comparatively normal in appearance, it was still ruins in the end. The outer wall was full of cracks, so much so that it seemed like it would fall apart with a strike. The wooden gate wouldn't budge even if you pulled or pushed it.

".....Ughh."

I'm at loss. Truly at loss.

Well, what shall I do?

I sat on the stairs that stretched towards the Royal Palace with a truly depressed expression, however, there was naturally no one who could call out to me out of concern, so I merely hung my head.

Should I turn back on the road, taking another half-day?

Or should I instead stay here?

These two were the choices presented to me. And I didn't want to choose either of them. If I try to follow the road I came at this time, it will definitely turn dark. Even if I safely return to the village, there's also a question on whether there's any lodging place that will let me stay. Even if you tell me to sleep here without returning to the village, that would be troubling on it's own right.

After all, it's all ruins here.

".....Haah."

But unfortunately, staying here in these ruins seems to be the better choice out of the two.

And so I chose it.

After all, the problem wouldn't be solved without a sacrifice. I'm very reluctant, but there's no other choice.

Let's stay here.

And so I stood up.

In order to search for a bed.

As a result of flying around on the broom in the skies of the small country, the Royal Palace turned out to be the place that retained the most decent appearance. Private houses were no good. They were, after all, crumbled to the point of being practically useless.

The gate of the Royal Palace was locked, but if you thought about it, there was no one there.

.....

It's fine right?

.....It's fine to do it, right?"

".....Eii."

After confirming once again that there was no one nearby, I burned that gate with Magic and it turned to ashes.

"Sorry for intruding....."

Then, I entered.

Compared to its outside that was full of cracks, the interior had kept its beautiful appearance. Although it was covered by dust, there were shortcomings with lodging.

Now, let's begin the search. First comes securing a bed.

The castle devoid of people had an ominous atmosphere drifting about. There was a faint air of unrest, feeling like some unknown thing would jump out any moment now.

While feeling a strange chilliness, I searched for the stairs. Being a traveler who wandered many countries, I knew that the room I was aiming for wasn't on the first floor. If there was a bedroom, it would be on the second floor. Or even further above, there should be a bedroom used by royalty.

In less than a few minutes after beginning the search, I discovered the stairs. Stepping firmly on the dust-covered carpet, I headed upstairs.

And then,

"Who are you?"

I heard a voice.

I reflexively raised my head while being attacked by a heart-

piercing feeling. Thereupon, I saw a woman standing at the end of the stairway.

I was about to cry. In every sense of the word.

## PART 2

"I didn't expect for someone to live here."

"I didn't expected that someone would come here."

The place she lead me was a bedroom full of elegance.

Although there was only a bed and desk that could be called furniture in it, if you were to speak of it's vastness... I wonder if it would be enough to fit one whole house from the village I stayed the other day. What is this even? Just what is this? Are you supposed to sleep at such place? Such extravagance.

"Where did you come from I wonder?"

As she pulled out a chair from the desk (an expensive-looking thing shining in gilded splendor) and sat on it, she directed a soft gaze at me.

"I came from a country far far away," I said. "I'm a traveler."

"Can I hear your name?"

"It's Elaina."

"I see. I'm Milarosé. Nice to meet you."

She smiled.

Her hair was red as blood and ruffled as if lightning passed through it. As she wore a tattered dress, I felt uneasy thinking whether she was a person with wild temperament, but she turned out to be a gentle person.

"Milarosé-san, why are you here?"

".....I don't know."

"Huh? What does that mean?"

"I don't know why I'm here." Milarosé-san warped her expression.  
"When I came to myself, I was in this ruined country."



".....That is..."

I wonder if it's something like amnesia—

But how? The ruin of this country shouldn't be something that happened today or yesterday. Roughly estimating, it was already in this state a month ago.

I put my questions into words as is.

"Why don't you leave from this country? Rather than staying here, living in another country should be much better. If it's money, it's scattered all around here."

The valuable things could be stolen from the castle if push came to shove.

"....."

After looking like she was thinking for a bit, she stood up. Then, she took out a single sheet of paper from the desk drawer, and beckoned to me.

Come here, that must be what she meant.

"This is the reason why I can't leave this place."

She showed me that paper. Messy characters that looked as if bugs crawled on it were tightly lined up from top to bottom.

It seems it was a letter.

While being urged by her, I read that letter.

You, who are reading this letter, Princess Milarosé is who you are. Even if you don't know anything, I know it.

Why are you here? Why is everything outside the windows ruined? Why don't you have your previous memory?

I'm sure you are perplexed from all the things you don't know, but I want you to calm down. I will explain everything in a little while.

To say that all the puzzles swirling in you will be solved, that isn't the case. But at least it will avoid your death by making a wrong choice. In other words, read this if you don't want to die.

By the way, is it day over there, or a night?

I'll assume that it's a night and advance the topic from there. If it's day by chance, well, it would be good if you just put it in the corner of your head that such things will continue to occur from now on.

Now.

I want you to look outside the window. Surely, the monster should be going rampant. That monster is the demon that destroyed this country, and also the cause of your amnesia.

That monster has no name. If I take this opportunity and give it a name, I would call it Javillier.

It wakes up along with sunset and continues to destroy the country until sunrise. If you decided to go out to get food supplies, I recommend you do so at daytime. The castle is safe. Inside the castle is the only place where Javillier can't enter.

Javillier's goal is to massacre everyone in this country. It comes to this country every night, and rages in search for the last remaining person.

The remaining person, in other words, is you.

It's aiming at you who became a Princess of a country without people. I'm begging you, don't leave the country. If you leave the country, Javillier will also leave the country in your pursuit.

For you, I have a sole request.

I want you to kill Javillier with your strength. Although, unless you kill that monster, you won't be able to leave the country, so I don't think you have much of a choice.

If it's your, a Witch's, Magic, then something like defeating Javillier should be an easy matter. Please, for our sakes, I want you to defeat

that monster.

So that you live.

And for those who were unfortunately murdered.

Then, at night.

The thing referred to as Javillier, was undoubtedly a monster.

Its giant body could be compared to the decayed buildings, and was covered with scales as black as dead of night.

It was named Javillier, but from outward appearance, it was just like a dragon.

If you plucked the wings off of a dragon, I think it would end up with that form. I don't know if it's because of that, but that dreadful of a monster spewed fire. Its appearance as it was destroying buildings with its giant muscular arm and burned down houses by spewing fire, rather than searching for the lone survivor Milarosé, it appeared as if it was just in a fit of rage.

"Rather than that, Milarosé-san, so you were a Witch?"

"Rather than that, Elaina-san, you are a Witch."

"No, well, me being a Witch should be obvious from my appearance."

My appearance is that of a Witch no matter how you look at it. Did she not see this brooch of mine?

"Just kidding."

Milarosé-san leaked a laugh while gazing down at the monster that rampaged as it liked outside the window.

I also followed her line of sight.

"But the person who wrote that letter also makes quite unreasonable requests, huh."

"That's right. Because to fight a monster like that and winning..... it's just ridiculous."

".....That reminds me." There's something bothering me. "Why was it written that only this castle was safe."

"Even if you ask me, I don't know the answer."

Well, that true.

I said.

"Wasn't that letter kind of strange? In the end, wouldn't the only things we learned after reading that letter be that the monster comes out at night, and that you must kill it?"

That's right, while it's tediously written down regarding the situation Milarosé-san is placed in at the moment, there's not a word written about the crucial part.

Why did Javillier appear and destroy the country? Why was she the only survivor? What is the relation between amnesia and Javillier?

All of that is truly a mystery, mystery, mystery. As if intentionally avoiding to inform her, they were splendidly omitted.

But for what reason?

"While it's true that there is a mountain of things I don't understand, I learned that I was Milarosé, the Princess of this country—and that this country was destroyed by the monster. If all that is true, then it is my mission to defeat that.....don't you think so?"

"Have you fought it?"

As I pointed at the monster rampaging outside, she shook her head.

"Not yet."

"That is an opponent I wouldn't wish to fight in a lifetime."

"Indeed."

"Milarosé-san, how many days would it be today that you've seen that monster?"

"It's only seventh day. It hasn't been that long ever since I woke up. Well, the country was already ruined a week ago though."

She looked up towards the sky. On a jet black sky with shining stars, the round moon was producing a little light. What would she be feeling at the moment?

I do not understand, and I can not understand.

"....."

After being silent for a little while, she opened her mouth.

"At night tomorrow, I'll be fighting that monster."

"Do you have a chance of victory?"

Even if it's me, I don't know whether I would be able to win if I challenged that monster. Probably the power difference is at a level where you would finally win after dying twice.

"There is, of course. You see, I remembered how to use Magic one week after I woke up. Perhaps I was a capable user before losing my memory." She put her hands on her back.

"Do your best. I'll cheer for you from a safe place."

"Ah, won't you give me a hand?"

"Is there some advantage for me if I aid you?"

".....That absurdly frank way of speaking of yours, I don't hate it."

"Why thank you."

After that, we indulged ourselves in an ambiguous act called friendly chat while looking at the gallant figure of the Javillier that raged in the neighborhood, after which we went to bed.

As for my bed, Milarosé-san lent me the bed that seemed to be

used by employees formerly. I'm thankful. It was all soft and fluffy.

## PART 3

Early morning of the next day.

I was woken up by the extraordinary thunderous roar. Enemy! Enemy-! Something kept screaming inside my head. My heart was also thumping just like when you sprint with all your might. Having somewhat bad premonition, I jumped up, grasped my staff, and went towards the first floor that was the source of the roaring sound.

"Oh, good morning."

The one who greeted me as I was walking on the first floor of the castle full of wariness was the the widely smiling Milarosé-san. Her dress was different from yesterday, but it was just as torn up as that one. Doesn't she have anything but the torn-up dresses? I pity her.

No, now's not the time for that.

"What was that sound just now. Is it an enemy attack?"

"Enemy.....?" She inclined her head in wonder. "I was just cooking. Was the sound really that loud?"

".....? C-Cooking?"

Perhaps the cooking that you are referring to is just an imaginary event.

"Yes. It will be done soon."

Nodding, she turned around and started to walk. Following behind her, I arrived to the kitchen.

"Wait in the next hall. Please wait."

".....Umm, do you need help?"

"It's fine."

".....Umm, but."

"It's fine."

"....."

I, who lost to her indescribable intimidating air, stepped back as she said. I was forced to step back. Then, as I faced towards the hall, I sat to one of the lined-up chairs. Then, I failed huh – I thought so.

I shouldn't have stepped back. I thought.

The sounds coming from the kitchen were like the noises of construction done at top speed. Baribari. Guchagucha. Gorigori. Bekibeki. Bokiboki. P-Please, spare at least this girl's life—Gyaaah. Goshigoshi. Pechipechi.

Something like that.

It was obviously not the sounds of cooking.

To make it worse, I even heard a scream of something at the end. My appetite was completely lost due to (something that took the name of) a fierce cooking.

It goes without saying that I greeted her, who brought food from the kitchen with satisfied expression, with a pale face.

"Oh my, are you alright? Your face seems to be pale."

".....Just what in the world were you doing?"

"As I said, I was cooking—Here, look at this."

The plate was put before me. On top of the white plate were placed two pieces of bread. One of them was a bread baked to full brown with a muddy red jam on top of it. Another one had a sunny-side-up fried egg placed on it.

.....Cooking?

What was that sound.....?

"Itadakimasu."

Sitting opposite of me, she bit into the bread with jam after holding her hands together.



".....Itadakimasu."

Imitating her, I also joined my hands.

The more deeply I thought about it, the more my head grew crazier it seemed, so I didn't pay attention the minor details. Probably, it would be considered a loss if I mind it.

Opposite to her, I bit into one with sunny-side-up fried egg. The faint appetizing soft taste of the wheat and the egg with just right degree of frying spread out throughout my mouth. It is a simple taste that can be eaten whenever you want to eat, but exactly because of that, it's been a while since I ate such cooking. My cheeks loosened up without me noticing.

In a word, it was really delicious.

"I'm thinking of talking about the night matter without delay."

Milarosé-san said.

"Night matter you say?"

"Yes. I want you to help me prepare a plan."

I replied while eating the egg, avoiding the the yolk.

"I received bed on top of breakfast, I will help you with that much without you asking."

"Then, how about defeating Javillier?"

"That's a little..."

In the first place, why is it that she must fight it? It seems to me that there won't be any problems even if she doesn't.

Probably expecting that I would firmly refuse, Milarosé-san's facial expression was calm.

"Well, I'm joking so don't worry. I'll deal with the matter of my country on my own. The person who wrote that letter would probably want that as well."

"....."

Now, how to accomplish that?

I stayed silent. It's not like it was because I was desperately trying to eat the the egg yolk without part of it spilling from my mouth. No, really.

"It would be good to hear what Elaina-san thinks. It's not certain that the content of that letter is truth. It would be stupid to believe everything when there's not a single thing written about important matters, wouldn't it?"

I got surprised, wondering if she could read my mind.

Ignoring me, who had words stuck in throat, she continued.

"However, as there's no basis to judge that now, this is the only thing I can do. Besides—to me, it just doesn't seem like that letter has lies in it. They truly hated that Javillier, wanted to kill it, that's why they wrote that letter to me—that's how I feel."

As I hit my chest and choked, Milarosé-san wordlessly handed over the cup with water. Ah, so kind.

".....Fuuh, thank you."

After catching my breath, I said. "No matter what you choose, it doesn't have any relation to me as I'm but a mere traveler. However, if you allow me to say one thing, if I was in your place, then I'd completely disregard the contents of that letter."

"Why is that?"

Milarosé-san smiled. That wasn't a scornful smile, neither was it bitter, it was just a gentle smile of someone who was enjoying the conversation.

She's truly a great person.

"Because it's suspicious—nothing more, nothing less. Even though you are in a state of amnesia where you can't tell left from right, you would be crazy if you just swallowed the contents of the letter with 'Oh, is that so'. Of course, I'm saying this while I haven't

actually experienced it myself."

"In that case, what would Elaina-san do?"

"I would run away. I would run with all my might and take refuge in another country."

I said.

"It was written in the letter that Javillier would come chasing after me were I to leave the country."

"That exactly why it's suspicious. Would that monster that doesn't even have a fragment of intelligence and merely seems to be raging in the surroundings actually be capable of that? What's more, it being unable to come to this castle is also incomprehensible, and the sender didn't write about it either..... it's really a letter with nothing but mystery in it."

"That's why you can't believe the contents, is that what you are saying?"

"That's right—And Milarosé-san, do you still intend to choose the route of fighting that monster despite that?"

"Of course."

She nodded.

In that case, what I have to do is also decided.

I took a bite on the bread with jam on it. It was mysteriously delicious jam, but it stuck inside my mouth.

## PART 4

We started preparations without delay. That said, it was just by my actions alone.

"....."

.....It's hard.

While elegantly drinking the black tea and watching over my work, Milarosé-san asked "How is it, do you think you'll finish it?" in a carefree manner.

As I turned back while trembling my staff, I said.

".....B-By the way, how much until it's over?"

Looking into the hole, she said in a cheerful manner. "Let's see, it needs half more digging perhaps."

".....I feel like I'm about to die."

I wonder if it's my imagination that the work amount and the reward appear to be obviously unbalanced.

If you ask what in the world am I made to do, I'm digging a hole. In the most spacious street of the country, I want to dig a hole with Magic, large enough that Javillier would fit in it completely—that was the preparations that she spoke of.

According to her, it appears that since Javillier doesn't have wings, if it fell into a pit, it would take a while for it to climb back up to the ground. In the meantime, if we continuously fire Magic towards that hole, wouldn't we be able to bury Javillier alive? – This was the plan that she told me.

It feels like a reckless attempt at glance, however, it's also true that against that unidentifiable monster, there's no other measure other than a primitive method like this.

If she suffered the damage of only a single hit, it seemed that it

would still blast apart her body into countless pieces, and I think that just by preventing it from counterattacking, the effect could be expected to be plenty enough.

The drawback was that the preparation was tiresome to death.

"Fuh, Fuuh..... Gunununu....."

From there, I gathered every scoop, shovel, and every little thing like a bucket, manipulated them with Magic, and started to dig with them. Oh how heroic. This effort and hard work, I want someone to compliment it.

Well, I'm also the holder of a title "The Witch of Ashes" and am a Witch with quite good ability, so naturally, it was possible to dig the hole in a more skillful way. For example, gouging out the ground like a cylinder. However, the Magic Power consumption would be unreasonable that way. After comparing Magic Power consumption with working by myself, I readily chose to work.

And the result of that is this.

".....Guoooo....."

By the way, I'm regretting it with all my might.

This is hard to the point of dying.

In the end, we finished the work after Milarosé-san lent me a hand. But still, it took time, and by the time the pitfall was finished, it was already evening.

The two of us were happily standing in line before that magnificent hole. I feel like some strange friendship has sprouted between us as a result of us working together. Or is it just my imagination?

".....It'll be soon now."

Milarosé-san said. Her expression appeared to be somewhat stiff from tension.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm a-a-a-a-alright. Yes, I'm alright."

It appears that you aren't alright at all.

"Though you are shaking all over."

"T-T-This is called trembling from excitement. You didn't know?"

"....."

You won't be able fight properly like this, will you?

After continuing to think about how to loosen her tension, I thought of a change of subject.

It was a bright idea.

"By the way, I forgot to ask one thing."

"Hm? What would it be?"

I said.

"Milarosé-san, why are you wearing torn up dresses? Could it be that you don't have any clean clothes?"

"That's not it. They become like that whenever I cook, so since changing them is troublesome, I'm just wearing them as is."

"What kind of cooking?....."

I was disappointed by that unexpectedly stupid reason.

And yet I thought it was hiding some more important secret.

"By the way, today's clothes are my best."

"They are already muddy on top of being torn though."

"Actually, I'm also wearing my special underwear."

"Are you intending to show it off to Javillier?"

"It's called sex appeal strategy."

"It would be nice if it was effective."

While we were having such trivial conversation, a smile returned to her face. I'm glad. My strategy was a success.

However, she said to me who was feeling relieved:

"Thank you."

".....Eh? What might you be meaning?" I turned my face away from her. My reddened cheeks must be because of the setting sun, that must be it.

"Your feelings have been transmitted. You were trying to loosen my tension right?"

"My my, I was only chatting, but to think that it would be considered that. It doesn't feel bad."

"Although you are absurdly frank, you are so dishonest."

Milarosé-san poked my side with her staff. it was ticklish.

"It's okay. I won't die," she said. "Let's meet again after this. I'll treat you an evening meal with my cooking."

"No thank you. I'll be the one making meal this evening," I said. "So, please don't die."

"Of course."

While saying such words, Milarosé-san covered the hole's surface. With this, Javillier wouldn't know about the hole and openly walk into it and fall.

The setting sun, dying the sky in red was shining faintly. The sky in which red and blue were clearly separated would soon set in darkness.

And before long, Javillier should arrive here.

"Now, go."

Milarosé-san pushed my back.

".....Let's meet again later."

As I said so, she once again showed me a soft smile. Just like that, I turned by back on her and started to walk.



## PART 5

Oops, did anyone say anything about leaving?

Just kidding. If I left like this, it would be the end of me as a human. No, well, I do think that refusing her at the beginning was really cold.

Right now, I was inside the private house on the opposite side of the pitfall, and was silently waiting for the right time. It's a pincer-attack strategy.

To say the truth, I really didn't intend to help her at first. After all, it was unrelated to me. Because I didn't know whether it was worth risking my life for, or if that monster was really necessary to defeat.

However, I changed my mind. The reason is that, just for a bit, I thought that I didn't want to let that lovely person die. That's why I fight.

Of course, to the extent of avoiding death.

I would like you to forgive me who can't honestly say "I will help you!" at this late hour.

"....."

Before long.

A repulsive roar sounding as if it crawled up from the depths of hell resounded extremely nearby. As I peeked at the situation outside, I saw black scales slowly passing by.

If it continues like this, it should have a perfect fall into the pitfall.

".....Fuuh."

I took a deep breath, that was almost unending.

It's strange. After all, even though I'd just met her yesterday, I ended up thinking that I want to let her live.

When this is over, let's make a meal together with her. While I'm at it, I'll take a look at her fierce cooking. That's really on my mind.

As I thought about this and that, the time has finally come.

The howl of the monster was heard. It seemed to be acting violently, and although it was faint, the vibration traveled up to the place I was at.

As I stealthily peaked at outside, I saw Milarosé-san engaged in a fascinating battle. She was mercilessly attacking Javillier that was trying to climb up from the hole with Magic one after another.

Ice spear, fireball, swords, axes, and such manipulated by Magic, blades of wind and lighting, and many other things.

Eh? Oh? Seems like she's winning? I thought so for a moment, but it wasn't like that. It was only a little, but Milarosé-san was being overpowered.

Javillier was spouting fire towards the sky and negating Magic fired by Milarosé-san, while trying to climb up from the hole.

If I'm going to go out, this is the best moment.

If both of us attack, we should be able to return it back to the hole once more. And then bury it.

Closing my eyes, I once again took a deep breath.

I strongly, really strongly grasped my staff. Let's do this.

"—Milarosé-san!"

It happened the moment I made up my mind and vigorously jumped out.

Something unbelievably fast passed by my side.

After splashing something on my face, it crashed into the private house behind me.

A thunderous roar reverberated.

As I touched my face with my hand, there was a slight smell of

iron. The viscous warm liquid was blood.

.....Blood. It can't be.

No, there's no wa—

I turned around while holding down by heartbeat.

".....Eh."

Buried in the mountain of debris was...

It was...

A dragon-like black head. It was Javillier's head. Blood spilled from the clean cut that seemed to have been done by a sharp-edged tool, and the pool of blood started to corrode the earth.

Why is Javillier's head here? Eh? Could it be, it was defeated without my turn?

As I was having trouble understanding the situation,

".....While I was attacking Javillier, I remembered it." I heard a voice.

It was a voice so cold it froze my spine. So much that I wondered whether it wasn't Milarosé-san but someone else who was talking.

But as I turned around, the one standing next to the headless Javillier was unmistakably Milarosé-san.

"Everything. Everything. Everything, everything, everything—I remember it. Aha...Ahahahaha...haha!"

Was the one standing there really the person I knew?

Milarosé-san invoked her Magic while disheveling her hair. Instantly, the limbs of headless Javillier had its limbs cut into pieces and blown off. The blown off flesh, while bleeding, covered the street that was already turned into ruins.

"....."

That made me tremble.

She laughed while being bathed in blood—It wasn't a gentle smile she showed me this morning, but rather a thoroughly warped, dark, dark smile.

"Aha...ahahahahahahaha! Hahahahahahahaha!"

No words came out. I wasn't able to do anything but to merely stand there.

## PART 6

After returning to the castle, I was told everything.

For one thing, it was a tale, and it was also a fact.

A few years ago from today, Milarosé-san had a lover.

But his existence was a secret for everyone. That is, the lover was her servant. If her father heard that she fell in love with a man from different social standing, she would surely be disinherited—fearing that, she lead a stealthy relationship so that no one would find out about it.

Both of them mutually loved and trusted one another.

But secrets get eventually exposed. Their secret was also no exception.

The truth of her being in relationship with the servant got exposed to the public in the worst way possible.

Milarosé-san became pregnant with his child.

The two of them, who had realized that it was impossible to keep it hidden any longer, told everything to Milarosé-san's father who was the king.

Quietly listening to their story, the king who seriously listened, while nodding several times, announced at the same time they finished their talk: "Execute that servant."

No one was able to calm the king's anger.

The king dragged him by horse while riding it himself, thoroughly peeled off his nails one by one, broke his teeth, submerged him in water, gave him just enough meals to stay alive, caused him to loiter

between life and death for two months, torturing him in every possible way until he went insane, and finally killed him by burning him at stake in front of Milarosé-san and his citizens.

Then, after he finished dealing with the servant, it came Milarosé-san's turn.

Since she was his own daughter and the sole Witch of the country, he didn't kill her, however, he couldn't allow a servant's child to be in her belly—and it seems that the king paid large sum of money to the doctor who lived in the country, and made him kill the child in her belly.

Naturally, no matter how many months she waited, her child was never born.

Then, she who lost everything made a vow.

I'll kill everything.

After that, she carefully polished her plan. The first thing to do was to put a barrier around the castle. For her plan, the castle must have been absolutely safe place. Since they were a bother, it seems that she had gathered all the people living inside the castle and locked them up in the basement.

All but the king, however.

She who seized the country, threw the king outside of the castle and put up the barrier. It was a barrier that repelled everyone aside from those with strong Magic Power—this is the reason why I – who am a Witch was able to enter.

Then, next, she addressed a letter to her future self—no, made someone to address it. It seems she dragged out a person from the basement, and made them write a letter while issuing instructions from the side. She thought it would be inconvenient if it was written by her.

Then, as she hid the written letter inside a desk drawer, from the room window, she looked down at the king who was trying

everything to enter the castle. The king, as soon as he saw her figure, flew into a rage. "It's because you became pregnant from someone like a servant, you are no longer my daughter", it appears he told her such things.

She silently directed her staff towards the shouting king, and put a curse on him—with her memories as a compensation.

The king who basked in the Magic Power mixed with memories and despair changed his form. That appearance of his with his body became enlarged, scales grew on his skin, and he lost his intelligence as a human.

It was a black dragon.

The king's name was Javillier.

It wasn't a mere coincidence that he had a similar name to that monster. And by creating a monster that became active only at night, her plan was completed.

She who had exhausted most of the Magic Power that dwelled in her body fell into a deep sleep for a short while.

The next time she opened her eyes, she had forgotten everything. However, everything was pre-established. Everything was simply following a fixed path.

Her confronting the black dragon was also included in her plans. And also the fact that while attacking it, the memories that spilled from the monster would return to her.

However, the problem was born here.

Why did she go out of her way to use her memories as a compensation? Milarosé-san should have been extremely troubled because of losing her memories. Besides, wouldn't she feel better if she maintained her memories, I also thought so.

As I asked, she smiled unintentionally.

"The reason I transferred my memories to that king was so that I

could show him my despair."

King Javillier, who had become a black dragon, did by no means lose his intelligence. It appears that he certainly retained his consciousness as a human while just his body was hijacked by a monster. Milarosé-san planned so that it would become so.

She probably wanted to torment the king, even intentionally taking such roundabout methods. King Javillier, who had become, a monster crushed his own people, while memories that Milarosé-san forced on him drifted in his head, he killed, killed, and continued killing his beloved citizens, and then—

Then, the tale that went entirely according to her plan, finally met it's end. By her own hands, who had now become the Princess of a country without people.



## PART 7

Early morning of the next day.

I left the castle without touching the cuisine that she made at all.

"So you are going already," she said in a calm manner, without making especially sorrowful face.

"I'm sorry. I'm a traveler after all. I must hurry ahead."

"Oh, is that so—such shame. Even though I enjoyed talking with you a lot."

"....."

"Why don't you take it more slowly?"

"Please stop."

"Just kidding."

She laughed. There was not a bit of gentleness in, but it was merely a distorted smile swirling with dark emotions.

The girl I knew is nowhere to be found anymore.

"What do you plan to do from now on, Milarosé-san?"

"I wonder what I should do—if anything, maybe I should go on a journey?"

"I wouldn't recommend that."

"Would it be fine if we go together I wonder?"

"Really, please stop."

"That was also a joke—truthfully, I haven't thought of anything yet. Right now, I want to immerse myself in the aftertaste of the revenge. "

She stroked a place near her stomach. Just like a mother who carried a new life in her belly.

There was nothing to say.

That's why I decided to quickly round it up.

"Well then, farewell. Be safe." While saying so, I got on my broom.

"You as well."

I flew on my broom.

Cutting the wind and advancing in a straight line.

I bet she is waving her hand. However I don't feel like turning around.

Faster and faster, rushing as much as I could, I left the country.

While flying over the ruin that was once a country.

## CHAPTER 13

# THE START OF THE JOURNEY

## PART 1

As a child, I loved books.

I don't remember when exactly I started to read books. However, I think I was already a bookworm by the time I gained awareness.

As long as I had time, I would take out a book from the bookshelf in my house and read it, and whenever I went out with my family, I would always ask for a new book.

Perhaps because of that, I didn't have many friends from the same generation. I didn't play much outside, and instead just stayed indoors, so I caused my parents to worry, however, my daily life was fulfilling. Because books were always next to me.

Among them, my favorite one was the novel called "Nike's Tales of Adventure".

It was a tale of adventure, all five volumes of which were collections of short stories that told about a Witch called Nike who travelled all over the world and experiencing it.

The author's name, just like its title, was Nike. However, since it's just a pen name, their real name is totally different. In the afterword at the end, "I wrote this book based on the events I personally experienced" was written.

The me at that time, who hadn't taken a step outside of the Peaceful Country of Robetta, saw Nike who wandered around the world, touring the beautiful world, as dazzling.

I really loved it, so I read it multiple times. So much that the book became worn-out.

Before long, I began to harbor admiration towards Nike.

—I also want try going on such journey. I started to think so.

For that reason, the young me declared to my mother.

"When I become older, I will go on an adventure just like Nike."

While gently brushing my head, mother said, "Is that so, when you grow older, huh."

And while smiling,

"However, if you want to go on a journey, you must first become a Witch like Nike, don't you think?"

She added that.

"Will I become traveler if I become a Witch?"

"That's right. That's why it will be no good if you don't do your best in Magic studies."

"If I study and become a Witch, will you let me go on a journey?"

"Of course."

"Really?"

"Yes. Really."

"Really really?"

"Yes. Really really."

"Yaay!"

My motive was such a trivial thing.

And because of just that reason, I spent so many years to become a Witch.

For the sole reason of wanting to go on a journey, I continued working hard.

At any rate, I studied alone almost every day.

My mother kept me company with Magic practice.

Mother, who was proficient in Magic to the extent that one could not believe she was just a Magician, was also skillful at teaching, and in the blink of an eye, I became able to skillfully operate Magic.

So much that I became an Apprentice Witch at the age of fourteen.

In the process of working for my goal to become a Witch, not even once did I think about giving up. I merely continued to work hard.

Then, after undergoing Fran-sensei's training, I became a Witch.

## PART 2

I went back to my parents' house with a star-shaped brooch attached to me, I guess it was a few days after that.

After finishing breakfast, I told to the two sitting on the opposite side of the table.

"I became a Witch. So let me go on a journey."

Raising his face away from the newspaper, my father frowned. My mother did not even show a surprise, and was calmly tasting an after meal black tea.

After stealing a glance at mother's face, father forcefully cleared his throat, after which he folded the newspaper and put it besides the table.

Then, with a really distant attitude,

"W-Wouldn't it be fine even if you don't rush so much?"

He said such a thing.

I became a bit sullen.

"That wasn't what you said, was it? I thought we made a promise that it would be fine if I went on a journey if I became a Witch?"

"No, we may have promised..... but to think you'd become one so soon....."

"It doesn't have relation with time. I desperately tried my best in order to go on a journey."

".....Muu."

Father, who was pricked at the weak spot and faltered, "Gununu" while groaning as such, touched the shoulder of mother who continued to drink her black tea with elegance.

"H-Hey, mother should say something as well."

After putting down the tea cup, she spoke.

"Oh my. Aren't you the only one who's opposed to Elaina going on a trip? I personally think it would already be fine if she left on a journey you know?"

".....No, but."

"Besides, going on a trip once she became a Witch is a promise from her childhood, right?"

"That promise was something you decided on your own——"

"You also agreed to it. Did you forget?"

".....But still."

"You agreed right?"

"....."

Father became silent.

Or rather, he was forced to.

"Elaina, you are serious, right?"

Mother asked me.

I nodded, "Of course," and replied so.

"Then, go on that journey."

"Yes!"

She paused a little, then said:

"However, I want you to promise me three things."

".....? Promise?"

Towards me who was looking puzzled, mother raised three fingers.

"That's right. If you don't keep these promises, you can't go on a journey even if you are a Witch. It's dangerous after all."

".....What do you want me to promise?" There's no way I could



pull back at this late hour.

"Well—listen up."

Then, mother folded her ring finger.

"First. To prioritize escaping as much as possible when you are likely to face dangers. Don't poke your nose in unnecessary things—because you might die if you do."

"Okay."

I would naturally keep that promise even without being told. I don't want to die anytime soon, after all.

Continuing, mother folded her middle finger.

"Second. Do not think of yourself as someone special—Witch or whatever you may be, you are a traveler. Don't ever be conceited, and don't forget that you are just like anyone else."

"Okay."

Because of training under Fran-sensei, the me who was strangely arrogant and caught up in the moment is already a thing from the past.

I also thought I didn't have any problems with this.

"Third—"

She lowered down her loosely formed fist.

Then, mother smiled.

"Come back without fail. Please come back and show us your cheerful face."

"....."

"Will you keep it?"

".....Yes."

I slowly nodded.

With that timing, father burst into tears.

"A-Are you really going Elainaa.....!?"

"Father dear, it's something that child decided on her own. Don't we have to support her back? What's more, we were the ones who made a promise with her. Tearing up isn't what a parent should do."

"Although father was trying to void that promise some time ago—"

I said in a small voice.

Fortunately, it seems he didn't hear it, and while wiping his tears, "My only daughter who I raised with care is already leaving the house.....it feels so empty. It feels like a wide hole opened in my heart....."

"No, well, I will come back sooner or later."

"You will probably die from shock when Elaina gets married."

"Stop it! We do not have to talk about my daughter's marriage now!" Father started to tear up yet again.

.....

Well, it was something like that.

The beginning of my trip was officially decided this way.

## PART 3

Next day.

"Un. The size is just right."

I dressed myself in a new outfit.

Black tricorne and black robe.

It was handed to be by mother.

"Isn't it a bit too plain?"

I checked it while turning around in front of the mirror.

"Oh my. For a traveler, something plain is just right. What's more, it matches you perfectly."

"Why thank you."

"Do you have money?"

"It's all set."

"I hope you don't waste it needlessly."

"Of course."

"Next is—ah, that's right. Just in case, take this with you."

".....?"

What appeared on top of her hand with a pop was a black tricorne.

It was of the exact same design as what mother put on me just a moment ago. ....why?

"In case your tricorne gets stolen by the wind, use this one," said mother to the puzzled me.

To put it simply,

"So it's a spare?"

"Yes it is."

In that case, I shall receive it.

And after I finished my long preparation, I stood at the entrance.

Looking back, the two of them stood there.

"Take care, Elaina." Mother waved her hand with a smile.

"U...Guh..... Uwoooooo....." Father started to cry again.

While caressing father's head, mother spoke to me. While floating a gentle smile.

"Whenever you return, please let me hear the story of your journey."

"Please look forward to it."

"I will—Then, take care."

After bowing, I said.

Said, while producing the best smile I could.

"I'm off!"



## CHAPTER 14

# THE ROYAL KINGDOM OF CELESTELLIA

## PART 1

As I advanced above the prairie with my broom, the flowers dashed as if opposing it. The grass that received the light of sun wilted away with a gentle sparkle and a sound similar to a burbling stream.

Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes.

The opposite side of the grasslands.

Located there was a country surrounded by walls.

Just how far does it spread out I wonder. I did think about circling around the walls with my broom, but it didn't feel like I would get back before the day darkened, so I gave up.

What's more, the gate was just before me, so there was no need to intentionally fly around it.

I advanced forward for a short time while enjoying the scenery, and then I descended from my broom.

The gate guard came out and silently bowed.

"Hello and welcome, Witch-sama. Excuse me, but may I hear your name?"

This was the usual inspection for entering the country.

"It's Elaina."

"How long will you be staying?"

"I think I'll leave within three days."

"And your Witch's Name?"

"The Witch of Ashes."

".....Witch of Ashes?" The gate guard stared at me.

"Huh? What is it?" I think he became puzzled.

"Ah, no. It's nothing. Excuse me."

The gate guard, who had fixed his appearance, withdrew from my front.

It seems the questions ended with that. I payed one silver as a fee for entering the country and passed through the gate.

"Welcome to the Royal Kingdom of Celestelia."

While receiving such words behind my back.



## PART 2

I was put on guard because of its formal name, but the district before my eyes was overflowing with liveliness.

Royal Kingdom of Celestelia is still quite a strange name.

People were coming and going on the ground patterned like interwoven bricks. Happy-looking married couple with child in hands. Children chasing each other. The elderly having a stroll. Just about everyone was immersed in daily life.

I walked.

The tall buildings were lined up on each side of the road and ropes were going between them. Clothes hanging from the rope were sunbathing. It seems they were drying their laundry.

As I took a deep breath I felt a sweet fragrance. There was a vase by one of the windows. The beautiful flowers of various colors could be seen to be shining.

A lovely town was spreading before me, seeming to make me lose my sense of time.

As I walked aimlessly around the district, there appeared one quite imposing building. On that building which was so big that made me think whether it was a Royal Palace, a clock tower was standing. It seemed that the site was quite large, and as it was obstructed by iron fences, I wasn't even able to draw near it.

I looked at the clock tower while strolling along the fence.

Then, I discovered the entrance.

‘Royal Magic Academy’

That's what was written on the gate, so it must be such a place.

So such institution also exists..... there was nothing as kind as this in my country.

I'm quite envious for the kids of this country.

.....I'm slightly interested about the interior.

Would it be fine to enter?

Should I just go in?

Let's go in.

I set my foot on its grounds.

"Hey, you. What do you think you are doing?"

Then after walking only a little, I was stopped.

My shoulders got firmly caught.

"Only authorized people can enter here. It is fine to look from the outside, but let's not go into the premises, okay?"

Turning around, there was a robust man standing there. He had swelling muscles and wore a tight suit. It appears he is a gatekeeper.

"....."

".....Oh?"

After dropping his sight to my chest, his attitude underwent a complete change.

"Pardon me. So you are a Witch..... please forgive my impolite speech."

"It's okay."

I shook of his hands and started advancing towards the school once more—

"I'm sorry, but I'd rather you don't go inside."

I was stopped.

"Ah, so it's no use after all?"

"No use."

"Even for a Witch?"

"The order was to unconditionally keep outsiders from entering."

"Whose order was that?"

"It was the order of the noble Witch-sama who manages this academy."

".....Haah."

"I'm told that it is in order to not let the knowledge about the ways of teaching leak out outside, because she can't bear the act of being imitated by foreign countries."

"Then, would it be fine if you just closed the gate?"

"We can't have that either. The noble Witch-sama is supposed to arrive at this school anytime now."

".....Haah."

Reluctantly, I left.

Bad luck.

It's too early to search for an inn right now.

I continued to loiter around the country.

This country is enjoyable just by walking.

"....."

Looking up, there were brooms flying above every house. And they didn't seem to only be flying, but the men sitting on brooms were dropping something down while flying above the houses in zig-zag.

I realized that they were newspaper delivery men after I saw a person coming out onto a balcony and opening up a newspaper there.

As I walked down the main street, I arrived at a street with stalls.

Fruit stores, greengrocers, butchers, and so on were crowding the both sides of the road.

There also appeared to be the bakery-san. There was a "Freshly Baked" signboard on it. There's no lie greater than this. Because it was all crusty.

"Excuse me, bread please."

The granny with good spirit smiled gently.

"It's one copper."

I took out a copper coin from my purse and handed it over to her.

The granny grabbed one loaf and shoved it into the bag. ....Did you grab it with bare hands?

"Here you go. Thank you for buying."

"Yeah.....thank you."

After accepting the bread, I strolled the stall street while biting into it. The bread that was clearly not freshly made was hard as a rock.

While walking with bread in hand, I got out of the street stall district.

Then, the figure of a Magician appeared once more. A man with large luggage tied to the broom was talking with the shopkeeper of a cafe.

"I want to deliver this to Amana-san's house on the western district. Transport it with caution, okay? Because it contains an important lunch in it."

"All righty!"

"Will it really.....?"

The man gave the grimacing shopkeeper a backward glance and slowly rose up, then flew off to somewhere.

I see, so he's doing delivery by using broom.

It appears that the Magician population of this country is quite high.

I also understand the reason of there being an academy that taught Magic.

Not only delivering things like luggage and newspapers, there were also Magicians who transported people. They were flying in the sky while fastened in the luggage carrier of the broom. —That said, it appears that transporting people alone was impossible, so they were working in pairs. It seems that one side was managing the operation of the broom, while other was lightening up the luggage carrier's weight with Magic.

There were Magicians not just in the sky but also on the ground.

On the shoulder of the main street, there were those who entertained people by demonstrating Magic.

People who moved puppets with Magic and did drama plays.

People who offered excitement by singing while livening up the place with Magic (by producing things like snow).

Every Magician was lively.

By the way, there's something that has been on my mind.

I do think that it's a good thing that these Magicians were living full of smiles, but isn't that difficult?

So I decided to ask.

Asking about something you don't know is the most efficient path, right?

"Excuse me—"

I found a square of the district by chance.

I called out to the Magician woman (she didn't wear robe nor had

brooch, so I figure she is a Mage) who was sitting on the bench and was reading a book.

"Hm? What is it?"

The woman looked at me with a gentle expression.

"I'm a traveler and there's something weighing on my mind. Can you inform me if you don't mind?"

"Oh my, what a lovely traveler." The woman giggled and revealed a smile. "So then, what is it? As long as it's something I know."

After pausing a little, I said.

"Don't the Magicians of this country find it difficult to fly in the skies?"

She bent her head. "Difficulty with flying.....? No, there's nothing like that?"

"Even though such thing exists?"

I pointed my finger. In that direction was a rope going in between tall buildings. With clothes hanging on it.

As she looked at that, she muttered 'Ahh.....'.

"Well, that's something made intentionally."

"Intentionally?"

"Yes—There are a lot of Magicians in this country, right? So, it's hard to fly that way."

".....?"

I don't get the meaning.

"Oh my. Was the explanation insufficient?"

"Please give me a bit more details."

She put the book beside her and said,

"When you are flying with broom, the more you are distant from earth the more tired you become right? So everyone wants to fly as

low as possible."

"That's correct."

I assented to it.

"But if everyone flies at a low height, it will get congested. They might even plunge into the houses when trying to avoid a passing by Magician. There being many Magicians brings about same level of risk."

Ah, I see.

"So, in order for them not to fly in between houses, it's being obstructed by ropes and clothes, right?"

She said with a smile.

"That's right. In this country, it was thought that Magicians should be considerate for the people who can't use Magic."

".....Were there no Magicians who complained about it?"

"Won't you understand that if you take a look at the state of this country?"

## PART 3

Taking out my broom, I flew in the air.

It's not like I flew with some objective in mind. It's just that I felt like seeing the scenery from above as well.

".....Wow."

In the sky, the scenery was quite different from the one on earth.

Roofs of various tinges like red, blue, light blue, or yellow were lined up at exactly same height. The blowing wind felt comfortable, and I thought it would've been really nice to admire it while lying on the roof.

It might be good to search for an inn to stay at for today from here on.

I flew around at random.

Greeting passer-by Magicians, returning waves to the kids who waved at me from the luggage carriers. While having a pleasant moments like that.

That reminds me.

In the country I visited before, didn't I abruptly collide with a girl all of a sudden. I wonder what she's doing alright now? Is she still undergoing training in order to become a Witch in her birthplace?

"....."

I stopped my broom. While forcibly stopping by broom, I stayed still in the sky.

Because I became sentimental after remembering about Saya-san..... of course it wasn't because of that.

Rather, it was because they appeared before my eyes that I



remembered about her.

"Umm, what?"

A pair of boy and girl appeared in my direction as if to obstruct my flight.

Black pants, or rather, a skirt, worn underneath black mantle and white cutter shirt. A red necktie hanging from the neck.

If you looked at their chests, it would become clear that they were Mages.

"Hello. You are the Witch of Ashes right?" the boy said.

"Ah, w-we are the students of Royal Magic Academy," the girl said.

Royal Magic Academy.

I see, so that academy that didn't let me in.

"And what business do the academy students have with me?"

"Umm..... Err, would you come with us without asking anything?"

The girl said such thing with hesitation.

It's extremely suspicious.

"For what reason?"

"No, as I said, without asking anything....."

"I refuse."

I gave immediate reply.

"Eeh! Why!?" The boy became excessively surprised.

"I don't really want to, so I refused."

Although my identity was known, why do I have to go along with them? What's more, without asking anything? Doesn't that make it double suspicious?

No way, no way.

"Umm, but....."

"Let me hear the reason first. I'll decide whether to follow you or not after that."

I resolutely said this to the girl who clearly seemed to be on the verge of fainting.

"That's..... impossible."

"Then, it's impossible for me as well."

The boy butted into the conversation. "Please somehow! I beg you, Miss Witch of Ashes! Please follow us without asking for a reason!"

"Again, I said I wouldn't if you don't tell me the reason, didn't I? You are persistent."

.....

I feel like we weren't making any progress.

The conversation would just continue without change if we keep it going like this.

Shall I escape?

Let's do it.

As I changed the direction of my broom, "Ah, I'm sorry. I remembered an urgent business," I told a lie.

Then, on the side opposite of them—

".....Eeh—?"

I tried to advance towards the opposite side.

However, the Magicians once again obstructed my path. In addition, they were several men and women with entirely different getup than the other two.

Oh no, what's happening? It became more and more ridiculous.

As I looked left and right, I saw people with the same appearance gathering near me one after another.

I was quickly surrounded. By the mysterious student group.

They were about twenty in number.

"Hey, you guys. Let's play with cooperation from now on." "That's right" "If all of us do it, we will catch her, probably." "Un." "Understood." "Don't monopolize the achievement." "Same goes for you."

The students moved slowly.

While I was in a state of complete unawareness, there was just one thing I clearly understood—At this rate, I'll be caught.

I have no idea what would happen if I was caught.

"....."

I slowly descended my broom slowly, and then,

"Ei!"

Hitting the broom, I did a fast takeoff.

While holding the tricorne in one hand so that it wouldn't be blown away by the broom that suddenly dashed into the sky with full power, I flew about above the district.

In short, I escaped.

Looking back, I saw the students shouting something while coming towards me.

Thus, the curtains to the chase with unknown objective opened up just like this.

However, it appears that the difference between the ability of a Witch and Mages was, after all, too big.

"....."

Although they persistently chased after me, I saw the distance between us gradually grow bigger. It's also a just matter of time before I shake them off completely.

However, even if I shook them off, my movement was completely visible in this beautiful scenery. It would be quite obvious as to where I escaped.

So then, what should I do?

Let's do this.

".....Tou."

I lowered my altitude, turned towards the horizontal direction, and flew slightly below the roofs of houses. I saw the ropes going between the houses. As I passed through, the entangled clothes started to sway.

At this altitude, being obstructed by the roofs, I won't be seen from a distance.

If they lose me once, it should be difficult to discover me again.

Looking back, there were still several students persistently chasing me around. There were supposed to be about twenty in all, did others give up?

However, I realized that wasn't so as I turned to face forward.

There were shapes of several students on the path I was supposed to advance. They were facing towards this way and flying.

".....Ahh—"

They anticipated it. The students moved in scattered manner.

The advantage was theirs. Completely.

I turned my broom towards the right and entered the back alley. Since it had become like this, let's thoroughly escape.

After advancing for a bit, the exit became visible.

However.

"Ah, found her!" The girl coming from that side blocked the exit and extended her hand towards me.

They also anticipated this.

But, if it's just this much.

"Please get obediently cau—eh?"

When I got to one's broom distance from her, I jumped down from the broom.

Then, after passing right under her, I called back my broom and continued flying.

It is a technique called aerial breakaway.

On top of it being used as a surprise attack, it's also somehow cool so I use it once in a while.

Even after I dealt with the girl, my path was blocked and I was trapped from the both the front and back. I had planned to hide by flying at low altitude, however it seems my position was completely exposed.

*In that case*, thinking so, this time I ascended towards the sky.

"....."

After rising to a certain degree of height, I overlooked the townscape.

From among the houses, or perhaps from the road, I could see that the students who noticed my movement had gathered. Apparently a little fatigue seemed to be accumulating as their speed wasn't much.

I waited in the sky until they approached me.

Before long, one male student from directly besides me,

"Doryaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

leaped at me while raising such strange voice.

I avoided him by lightly moving the broom

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

Again, the boy raised a strange voice while passing by me.

As if that was a signal, this time, the students from every side made their move all at once. Their number—I counted up to ten and then gave up since it was bothersome, it was probably everyone who surrounded me at the beginning.

It seems their composure already didn't let them speak human words, and the voice escaping from their mouths were nothing but strange.

"Gyaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Nyaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Oruaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Hyaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Shaoraaaaaaaaa"

"Konakusoooooooo!"

Like that.

I composed myself and avoided the rushing students. To the right, left, above, and below, sometimes even while turning around.

Anyhow, I continued to avoid.

They didn't start attacking me, so I didn't take out my staff either and simply continued to stick with just avoiding them.

"Gyaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh....."

"Aa....."

"Ua....."

"Haa....."

"Hiiiiiiiiiii....."

"I-It's hopeless....."

I don't know just how long that continued.

Before I noticed, the students' movements became slow, and eventually no one was coming toward me.

It seems it was already their limit.

They all gathered in the same spot,

"I can't do it anymore....." Someone from them said while being out of breath.

"I-I'm about to die....." Someone said with a blue face.

While maintaining a calm tone to the end,

"Everyone, just what is your goal? What is it you want from me?"

I asked them a question.

However, there came no answer. But only breathing escaped from their mouths.

"I think you should understand it plenty enough now that you won't be able to catch me even if you form a group. Please just give up."

Although I tried saying that, they didn't return the words after all.

Without minding it, I added,

"So then, you guys, just who——"

ordered you? – I swallowed the words I was about to say.

Because I lost my words.

There appeared... a Witch.

Someone from the students was looking at the same thing as me and leaked a voice, "Ah, Sensei....." Caught by that voice, all the students fixed their appearances at once.

The girl who came approached us on a broom, facing towards the out-of-breath students and spoke, while floating a truly wide smile.

"Good work everyone. How was it? Even after you tried to catch a Witch with all your might, you were no opponent to her, right? This

is the difference between you and a Witch. Age doesn't have relation to it. Because the Witch of Ashes over there is so powerful that she can't even be compared with you——"

Hair, black as the dead of night. And a matching dark robe and a tricorne. Shinning on her chest, was a star-shaped brooch.

She who hasn't changed a bit in the past three years smiled at me.

That person was my teacher.

"It's been a while. Elaina."

It was Fran-sensei.



## PART 4

"I'm sorry, Elaina. I'll explain the full details myself—but first, shall we go to the academy?"

Fran-sensei said apologetically while guiding me and the students to the Royal Magic Academy.

Refusing her request wasn't even a choice. After all, there were mountain of things I wanted to talk about with her.

Perhaps the appearance of the twenty frail Magicians gathered up and flying together looked quite like migratory birds.

While I blankly stared at Fran-sensei's back and thought things like, 'she hasn't changed at all, huh, how old is she now I wonder', before I noticed, we had arrived at the academy.

Then, Fran-sensei spoke while coming down from the broom on the academy grounds.

"Everyone, today's extracurricular lesson has ended with this. That's enough for today—I hope you submit your thoughts about today at morning tomorrow."

"Yees!", "Thank you very much!" After giving quite spiritless responses, the students dispersed.

It appeared they were quite tired, as some where unsteadily flying in the sky, while others gave up on it and were returning home by foot.

Fran-sensei revealed a smile in such situation.

"Oh my. Did you torment them too much, Elaina?"

"Is it my fault?"

"It's not my fault either."

".....You are acting as a teacher at this academy, Fran-sensei?"

"Yes. I was invited by the King-sama of this country a little earlier than when I trained you."

"....." First time hearing it. "That means you left school for a whole year? You are lucky you didn't get yourself fired."

"Yes. Well, it's because I'm not usually in charge of the lessons. Occasionally like this, I give extracurricular classes to just interested parties, or give guidance to teachers, that's my specialty. Besides——"

Fran-sensei, while looking at me,

"When I told them I taught Magic to you, all the teachers understood it."

And added that.

Huh? How come?

"To me, you say?"

"Yes. If the other party wasn't you, I might perhaps have been fired."

"Although I'm not supposed to be such an outrageous person."

"I wonder about that."

She said in her usual smile.

Then,

"Well, come inside. There are lots of things I want to talk about with you."

She said and pointed at the academy building behind her.

My feelings were the same.

The inside of the building was extremely modest.

Desk and chairs were lined up at equal intervals in square rooms. In front of them was a large blackboard. There were no useless ornaments on it.

Similar landscapes were lined up on one side of the corridor.

On the opposite side was a window. The vast academy grounds could be seen from here.

"You see, this academy was originally a place where they taught normal scholarship."

Then I was told, "But the new school buildings are being newly established—So as this place became unnecessary, they let us use it as an academy that taught both Magic and scholarship."

"The students who tried to catch me..... are also students from here, right?"

Sensei nodded.

"Yes. As a part of the extracurricular lesson, I asked them to bring you to me without letting you know about the circumstances, or even forcibly drag you here."

".....Why did you do such a thing?"

"You won't get it unless I tell you?"

"I wouldn't."

"....."

After staying silent for a short while, Fran-sensei hit my shoulders with both hands, "Because I wanted to meet you."

And said so in a tiny voice, as if whispering.

"....."

I felt gloomy feelings being born inside of me.

I thought this person was sly. If you tell me something like that, I can't get mad anymore.

I changed the topic.

"Why did you notice that I came to this district?"

"You tried to enter the academy on a whim didn't you?"

".....Ah."

A huge gate could be seen outside the window. I was certainly stopped there by a robust man.

Fran-sensei followed my sight and nodded.

"That's right. The gatekeeper told me when I returned to academy. "A young Witch with ashen hair tried to enter here. She might be a spy from a foreign country." – Is what he said."

"A spy....."

That was quite a leap in logic.....

"I realized it the moment I heard about your characteristics. "Aah, that's undoubtedly Elaina," I thought. I then swiftly went to the gate guard and confirmed whether you had really entered the country."

We came to the end of a corridor.

Fran-sensei turned around the corner and went upstairs. I also followed her.

"There was indeed your name in the country entry records. You came to this country this morning, right?"

"Yes."

I nodded.

".....My apprentice came to this country. After realizing that, I couldn't contain myself. So I decided to search for you—by using the students."

"....."

"When I returned to the academy, it was just in time to do extracurricular lessons for just the most prominent students. So, I gave the students the following instructions."

After climbing the stairs, what appeared was a single door.

Fran-sensei touched and opened it. Perhaps the fitting was bad as it gave an unpleasant creaking sound.

"There is a Witch of Ashes in this country. Bring that Witch here without telling her of the circumstances. Or, if you are even able to forcibly drag her here, then I'll raise your grades——"

"Why did you use such roundabout ways....."

Wouldn't it be fine if she just normally searched?

Sensei released a sigh and spoke.

"Don't you think it's close to impossible to search for you in this vast country by myself?"

Then, as she stood next to the opened door,

"Now, come in."

She said.

While urged, I passed by her and entered inside

It appeared to be a room that served as both reception and a study room.

In the middle of it was a sofa across the table. Opposite of it was a desk, and various documents and books were piled up on it without order.

I heard the door behind me closing. Again, it was an unpleasant sound.

"What's wrong? Sit down." Sensei passed before me and went towards the sofa.

"Ah, okay."

I sat on the sofa in a way to face Fran-sensei. It was soft.

"I was really surprised when I discovered that you came to this country, you know? Although I knew that you became a traveler."

.....? Oh?

"You knew it?"

"Yes. Of course I knew."

"I don't believe I've talked with Fran-sensei about becoming a traveler."

To begin with, I've just met her for the first time in several years.

The people who know about me becoming a traveler only include my parents and the residents of the Peaceful Country of Robetta. Fran-sensei knowing about it is really strange.

Fran-sensei told to me who was bewildered,

"Elaina, do you still remember what I told you when the training was over?"

—Goodbye, Elaina. I will come to visit again someday. Please look forward to it.

No, well, she certainly said that, but...

She revealed an impish smile. "I had business so I went to Robetta once more in the year following training. Then, Elaina's parents told me, "She left on a journey"."

"So you met with mother?"

"Yes—she was really worried about you. If you pass close to your birthplace, please visit home once."

"I plan to do so."

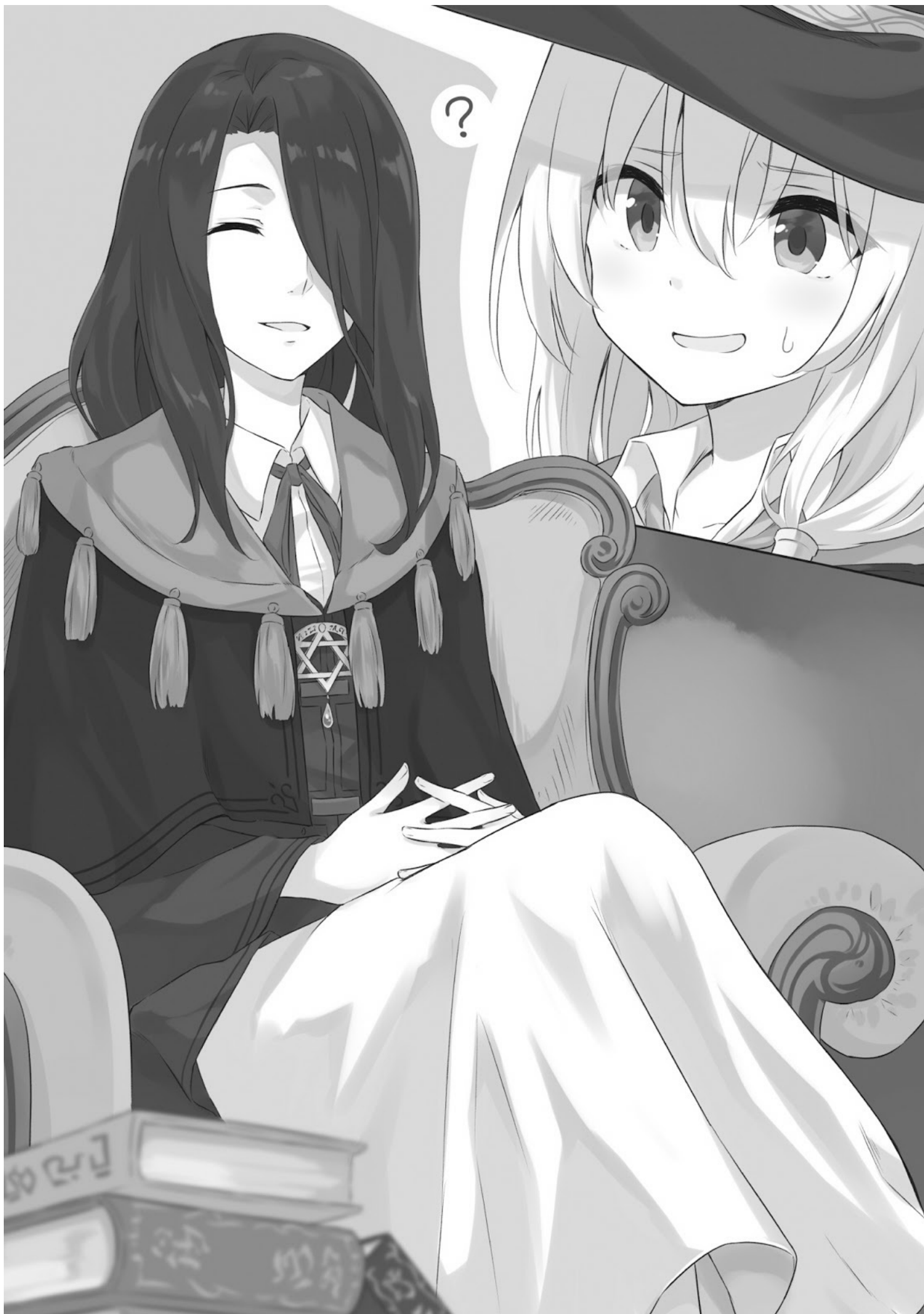
However, I have come quite far from it, so meeting them once more is still a thing of future.

"Then that's good."

Then, Fran-sensei paused for a bit,

"That reminds me, Elaina, why did you think of becoming a traveler? Was it your mother's influence after all?"

She asked me.



.....?

Why did mother appear here? I inclined my head.

"No, that's not it..... I read the novel called "Nike's Tales of Adventure" as a child. It had the biggest influence on me."

".....Oh." Fran-sensei raised her eyebrows just a little, "Hmm..... I see," and started to ponder on something.

That was a strange reaction.

"Um, what is it?"

Fran-sensei shook her head towards my question.

"No, it's nothing—rather than that, "Nike's Tales of Adventure" was it? You have a nice taste. That book is also my favorite."

"Ufufu. I have read it so many times that I can recite all five volumes of short stories from my memory."

I boasted.

"Oh my. ....By the way, which was your favorite story? My favorite was the last story "Apprentice Witch Foula"."

".....! That's also my favorite."

If I remember correctly, that story was about a Witch Nike visiting a certain country and taking an Apprentice Witch girl called Foula as an apprentice and raising her to be a Witch.

At the end of that story, Nike abandoned her way of life as a Witch spent her life in a rural area as a simple woman. Then, Foula, who had become a Witch, became a new traveler—that was the content of that story.

"Apprentice Witch Foula, by the way, could be talking about me."

Fran-sensei said something strange.

"What are you saying?"

"Now, I wonder what indeed." Ufufu, Fran-sensei smiled. ""Nike's



Tales of Adventure" is a masterpiece, and is greatly popular even in this country."

"But, it's quite an old novel, right?"

"Good works live long."

".....That's true."

As an old fan, there's nothing as delightful as that.

If something, personally advertizing "Nike's Tales of Adventure" as a link to my journey might be good. ....It would probably fall into a setback due to budgetary reasons.

"That reminds me."

Breaking my thought process, Fran-sensei said abruptly, "Elaina, when do you plan to leave this country?"

".....I was thinking of departing on the morning the day after tomorrow."

"Day after tomorrow huh?"

"Yes."

I can't stay for too long, after all.

—All the more if Fran-sensei is here.

"Do you have plans tomorrow? Is there something you have to do?"

"Tomorrow? No, nothing in particular....."

"Then, do you have free time?" Fran-sensei nibbled.

What is it?

While being slightly in a loss, "Well, I do have..... free time." I replied so. I don't mean that there is nothing to do, but it wouldn't be mistake either to say that I don't have a free time because I'm just going sightseeing.

"That's good."

Fran-sensei smiled.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, there's something I want your help with tomorrow."

"Ah, okay. I don't mind—What is it you need help with?"

"I want you to help me with guiding the students."

"....."

It sounds somehow suspicious.

"I want you to help me with guiding the students."

I was told that twice for some reason.

Super suspicious.....

After that, we talked about lots of things. We forgot the time and engrossed ourselves in talking.

It was a talk about various people I met across the journey. The tales of countries I had visited. Tales of some others, even names of some whose I didn't know.

On and on, our conversation didn't know of interruption.

How good it would be if time stopped like this? I thought of such thing. However, it seems the fun time passed in the blink of an eye, and before we noticed, the outside darkened as if it was painted over.

"Oh. It's already this late. Shall we head home for about now?"

Honestly speaking, I wanted to keep on talking some more.

"Do you want to stay at my house?" I was invited by Fran-sensei when we got out from the academy building, however I refused.

Because I'm sure that more I get spoiled by her, the more difficult I would find to return back to journey.

The parting would become painful.

In the midst of the darkness, I walked in search for the inn.

In the middle of it, a window of some house suddenly caught my eye. The window illuminated by the moonlight was vividly reflecting the outside scenery.

And there.

Was the appearance of me with a face brimming with smile.

## PART 5

Early morning of the next day.

I, who woke up at the cheap inn that I found after walking about, quickly changed into the Witch-like outfit and went outside.

I mounted on my broom in front of the inn's exit and ascended into the sky. My direction was, of course, the Royal Magic Academy. I flew while exchanging light greetings with the young men who dropped newspapers in houses from morning, and the pair who acted as the carriage and flew. The morning wind was chilly and my still-remaining drowsiness was blown far away.

Thanks to the large tower being a landmark, I was able to arrive at once without losing my way.

As I overlooked the academy from the sky above, I saw the shapes of people scattered throughout the its grounds—they were students.

Their number was approximately twenty. It was practically the same number as the people who chased me yesterday.

There was also the shape of Fran-sensei among them.

I got off the broom and stood on the ground beside her. The hard sensation of the ground traveled through both legs.

"Oh, good morning. You are quite early. Although I don't think I have specified the exact time."

Fran-sensei gave me a smile.

"I came early because you didn't specify the time."

"Oh my. Are you blaming me?"

"No no. I just want you to praise me."

"You are great, great."

"Why yes, thank you."

"However, with this we can start earlier than usual—"

Then Sensei clapped her hands twice.

With that, the students hurriedly finished the Magic practices and gathered. Moreover, with full speed. Perhaps because of hurrying, there were also students who threw the water that had been used for training on the ground.

"Everyone, this is the Witch of Ashes, Elaina. You meet her yesterday so you should know her, right?"

Fran-sensei introduced me while facing the gathered up students.

I swiftly bowed, "Ah, hello," and said just that.

"I was thinking of letting her act as a guest lecturer today. Although her age is near yours, she's a splendid Witch. I hope you don't look down on her."

Then, after confirming that students have nodded few times,

"Are there any questions for her?"

She addressed them.

The one who quickly raised his hand was a bright-looking, refreshing young man.

"Me mee! Boyfriend? Do you have a boyfriend?"

Whoops, I made a mistake. He was a slow-witted, impure young man.

"I don't. I'm a traveler after all."

"Please only questions related to Magic," Fran-sensei rounded off with a clap. "Any others?"

Next one to raise hand was a timid-looking girl. If I recall correctly, I think it was the girl from the first pair that confronted me.

She hesitantly looked at me and asked.

"Umm..... What's your specialty Magic.....?"

I'm glad it was a normal question. "I don't really have a particular specialty. Attack Magic, Manipulation Magic, Transformation Magic, and everything else, I can use it to some extent."

"Anything else?"

Someone raised their hand.

"Which was your favorite from the countries you have visited so far?"

"This country."

"Oh, is that a flattery?" Fran-sensei interrupted.

Then someone raised their hand once more.

One after another, without ceasing.

"What was it that made you decide to be a witch?"

"I read the novel called 'Nike's Tales of Adventure'.....that would be my biggest reason."

"What's Elaina-san's country of origin?"

"It's a far, distant border country called the Peaceful Country of Robetta."

"Please teach me the secrets to Magic!"

"It's only about putting effort."

"Is being a traveler fun?"

"Yes, amazingly so."

"Me mee! How about panties? What's the color of your pan——"

Fran-sensei physically put an end to the slow-witted boy's question time.

The morning extracurricular lesson went smoothly.

However, I didn't know how to guide the students at all, so for the time being, I looked at what kind of teaching Fran-sensei was doing.

She was:

"Oh my. Your Magic flow is disordered. Calm your mind some more, stabilize your Magic Power."

"You released too much Magic Power. Suppress it some more."

"Hey. You shouldn't play with a sword-shaped water."

.....Like that, she was walking among the students one by one and giving them proper guidance.

Fumu fumu, I see.

Then, let's mimic her actions—I walked between the students at a slow pace.

It seems that Magic control training is ongoing. Just like before, the students were moving the water that was inside the bottle. It's just a basic practice, but freely moving objects like this is the first step to improving your Magic ability.

While I was walking around in proper manner,

"Ah, Elaina-sensei. I can't turn water into a perfect sphere, what should I do?"

Asked the male student.

Although the water was floating on the tip of the staff he held in hand, the water was swaying around as if it was boiling.

I see, I see.

"You seem to have added a useless amount of Magic. Remove some more power."

"Yes!"

Following that:

With a splash, a puddle of water appeared under the male student's feet.

".....Looks like suppressing it didn't go too well."

"You suppressed it to much."

Too bad.

As I gave a compassionate look at the dejected male student, "U-Um....." I heard a small voice that lacked self-confidence from behind.

Looking back, it was the hesitant girl.

"Hm? What's wrong? I bent my head in wonder.

"Ah, yes..... Um, there's something I want you to teach me....."

"Sure. What is it?"

After pausing for a little,

"Um, my water manipulation never goes well..... I can just barely elevate it..... what should I do?"

She said while looking down.

Fumu Fumu.

"Let me see it for a bit."

"Eh? Ah, yes....."

She clasped the staff with both hands and sent Magic Power towards the bottle with water.

The bottle moved in about ten odd seconds after that.

At first whole bottle had parted from earth, but then, as if remembering it, only the water was raised after it. Then, the lump of water raised up to her height and stopped.

—When I thought so, it suddenly splashed into the ground.

"Oh?"



".....What should I do?"

She teared up.

The situation appeared to be grave.

"It seems you haven't got the grasp of it yet—I think it would be better if you work on getting the water out of the bottle for start."

"Y-Yes....."

"After taking the water out of the bottle, quickly return it back, then take it out once more. If you continuously repeat this process, I think you will get used to it to a certain extent. Carefully take your time, find the best way to do it for yourself. That's the biggest shortcut. Do your best."

".....Y-Yes!"

That was the the most what I could give as advice.

As I saw her running off to fetch the water, I once again continued walking.

Thereupon, someone called me from behind.

"Hey hey! Elaina-sensei, look! Doesn't this look cool?"

The slow-witted impure male student made a water crown and put it on.

I ignored him.

All students (except one) were very enthusiastic, so they asked for advice without me even calling out to them. It looks like they found it easy to ask me who was around their age.

It wasn't a bad feeling.

Their training continued on until Fran-sensei clapped her hands twice.

Looks like Fran-sensei's work for today ended with the end of

morning extracurricular lessons.

From how it was yesterday, is there extracurricular lesson in the evening? I thought so, but according to Sensei, "When we do it in the morning, we don't do it in the evening. And when we don't do it in the morning, we do it in the evening," seemed so be the case. In short, it was a once-a-day extracurricular lessons.

"Why don't you do it more than once a day?"

I tried asking her.

"Wouldn't it be tiring?"

Was the immediate reply.

"So you are being considerate that the students would get tired if you did it more than once?" I see I see.

"No, I'll get tired so I'm not doing it."

"....."

I feel something indescribable.

## PART 6

After the extracurricular lessons were over, I was led by Fran-sensei and left the building. Then, we calmly flew in the sky, and ahead was a high hill. Fran-sensei descended on top of it.

I followed after her. The soft lawn raised sounds.

Looking down, the greenery stretched while drawing a gentle arc.

The townscape was spread beyond the wooden fences.

The private houses with various tinges. The trees before us drifted by the wind and their leaves were stolen somewhere far away. Opposite of it was the academy with tower that became a landmark proudly claiming its presence.

In the sky of fine blue, the clouds drifted. They were white clouds with no stagnation.

"This is my favorite spot."

—Isn't it a nice view? Fran-sensei said.

"Yes. Absolutely."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Fran-sensei's black hair faintly swayed by the gentry blowing wind.

Then she,

"I wanted to show it to you once before you left this country. My favorite spot."

Said so and smiled.

Tempted by her, I also felt my cheeks loosen.

"Thank you very much."

"You're welcome—you are living tomorrow morning right?"

"Yes. I can't stay for too long after all."

"That's a shame..... Because my students appear to be extremely fond of you."

"A young Witch is only rare." Or maybe a traveler.

"Even so, being liked is a wonderful thing. I'm being avoided by students even now."

"....."

Rather than being avoided, I think it's just them not understanding the sense of distance because of Sensei's ungraspable character.

I won't say it though. I can't say it.

"What's wrong?"

".....No, nothing."

I looked at the academy that was seen distantly in order to avoid Fran-sensei's gaze. "That reminds me, you are teaching Magic at that school, right?"

"Hm? That's right?"

"What will you do after the graduation?"

"I'll just normally work in the country. For example, luggage delivery work, or giving rides to people. If you went for sightseeing, you should have seen it several times, right? The Magicians flying above the roofs.

I see.

"Are the people who performed at downtown also the graduates from this academy?"

Demonstrating Magic on the shoulder of the road. Manipulating puppets. People singing while surrounded by Magic productions.

Was every Magician who I saw on streets the people who studied in Royal Magic Academy I wonder?

Fran-sensei assented.

"Yes—But, well, they are just doing it as a hobby. It's not an official business."

"A hobby you say..... But they are receiving money, aren't they?"

"Well, they are receiving it. Although a very small amount. But they aren't showing Magic because they want to earn money."

"Then for what?"

"Just because they love to," Fran-sensei clearly said, "Elaina also loved journey and went on it because of it, right? It's the same. They also do it because they like to make people happy."

"....."

Not for the money but for themselves.

Or maybe for others.

Because they like it.

After entering this country, I thought many times that it was a lovely country. It had a beautiful townscape and a vast territory. People spending time full of smiles. I was moved so much that my breath escaped every time I came across them.

It might be because the country named Royal Kingdom of Celestelia—overlapped somewhere with my journey itself.

"Speaking of which, what is Elaina's favorite thing?"

Fran-sensei abruptly said.

"Travelling." I gave an immediate reply.

"Aside from travelling."

"....."

Aside from travelling, what else it it?

After all, it would be what became a trigger for my trip.

"It would be books I guess."

"Books....." After a short pause, "Aside from that?" Fran-sensei asked once more.

She's quite suggestive.

"Um, what is it? Since some time ago."

"No, well, something was slightly on my mind."

"Are you planning to give me a parting gift?"

I jokingly said it.

"Well, yes."

To my embarrassment, it was affirmed readily.

Ooh. Such thing.

".....Ah, no, it's fine, something like a parting gift. Your feelings alone are enough."

"Now now, you don't have to say that. How about you try to talk about your favorite things? How about flowers for example?"

"Aren't you taking the leading role already?"

"How is it, the flowers? Ah, maybe something like a butterfly as well?"

"That's Fran-sensei's favorite thing."

"Since it's my favorite, then you who's my pupil should also like it, right?"

"What's with that unreasonable theory?"

"You don't like butterflies then?"

"Just normally."

"I see. You just normally like it."

"It seems it would be better if I said it's somewhere between liking and disliking."

"So how about it? The flowers."

"You went back to them."

"How about them?"

"Well, I do like them....."

"Then that's good."

".....? What is?"

"It's a secret."

Fran-sensei said with the ever unchanging smile. While I was bombarded by questions by her, she didn't answer the one thing I asked.

After living together with her for a year, even after meeting her after a long time, Fran-sensei was the same as ever. Even now, I don't fully understand what kind of person she is.

But not understanding her is the point that makes her her.

I already got used to it.

"What is it? Won't that make me curious?"

I expected the returned words, but I still tried asking. Then, predicting my words, Fran-sensei said, While impishly closing one eye,

"Look forward to it tomorrow."

Let's see, I wonder what you're saying.

"I'm planning to depart tomorrow morning though....."

"Yes. That's why, I'm saying to look forward to it before you leave the country—tomorrow morning, let's meet up in front of the gate.

## PART 7

Then, time passed and the next morning arrived.

I slowly walked on the main street—following back on the road I came with and headed towards the gate. While passing through the shopping district, watching the Magicians flying in the sky. While passing under a rope passing through between buildings like an arch. While feeling the sweet fragrance of the blooming flowers from somewhere, I continued to walk.

So reluctant to part with it.

"....."

But it's natural that if you walk, you will arrive at your destination. And I arrived near the gate.

Noticing me, the gate guard bowed. I also gave a delayed bow.

If I advanced just a bit more, I would be leaving this country. However, looking around, there was no sight of Fran-sensei.

.....As we had not specified the exact time, she might have not yet arrived.

"....."

Unexpectedly, it may be better to leave the country without saying anything like this.

I don't know what Fran-sensei will give me—but, well, judging from yesterday's talk, she probably plans to give me flowers. However, I will only become troubled by receiving it.

When they rot and I have to discard them, it will feel empty.

Also, whenever I see similar flowers, at that time, I would probably be reminded of Fran-sensei and this country.

That's not a very good tendency as a traveler.



Because I would become sad.

"....."

If I leave like this, then it probably won't leave bitter feelings.

In that case, it's after all better for me to leave like—

".....Eh?"

I stopped the foot I was about to step forward in its tracks.

It was because flower petals started to fall from the sky. Red, blue, yellow. Pink, violet. The petals of various colors fluttered down just like snow. Fluttered silently, while drifting a sweet fragrance.

I immediately realized that something like this was impossible if you thought about it normally—and as I looked up, there was after all, her figure.

"You were quite early—Elaina. Our preparations barely made in time."

—Our.

Around Fran-sensei who was waving at me, there were shapes of the students. They flew in the sky while dropping down the petals from the baskets they held in hands.

Each and every one of them was smiling.

"Elaina."

Fran-sensei said from above the broom. "I do not have right to detain you who became a traveler by your own desire. This is the most what I can do."

".....Sensei."

"Have you been pleased?"

"....."

I replied.

While Inhaling air with all my might, "Yes, absolutely!".

And then, I started to walk. I passed while the multi-colored flower petals whirled around me.

"Elaina."

Fran-sensei called out to me, "The academy students and I will be cheering for your journey with all our hearts. Please don't ever forget that."

"....." I replied as I gazed up at the sky, "I also won't forget about everyone!"

Before long I stood in front of the gate.

The gate guard bowed and opened the doors.

Stretching beyond it were the gentle plains.

"Elaina."

Just one last thing—Fran-sensei said from the sky, "Let's meet again someday. Until then, farewell."

She said such thing.

Surely, she was smiling just like usual.

That's why, I also returned the smile.

".....Yes!"

## PART 8

A broom traveled across the plains.

The flowers shined as they received the bright sunlight and swayed to the blowing wind. The cloudless blue sky continued without end.

The one mounting the broom was a Witch and also a traveler.

Her age was still young, being in latter teens.

Her ashen hair swayed and her azure eyes were directed towards the boundary between the never-ending grasslands and the sky.

Wearing a black tricorn and a black robe, with a star-shaped brooch attached to her, she continued to fly while scattering the flowers.

Pointing the broom towards the direction where there is the world yet to be seen.

What kind of country will the next one be? What kind of people will I meet next? Will it be a country full of Magicians? Or will it be the country with excessively high prices? Or perhaps, the country that might be destroying itself.

With such thoughts in mind, the traveler continued to fly.

Who in the world was that traveler?

It was me.

# AFTERWORD

Nice to meet you, I'm Shiraishi Jougi.

This book "Majo no Tabitabi", the novel of a complete amateur like me, privately published in the Amazon Kindle store at the end of 2014, had underwent a drastic editing and revision by the hands of GA bunko's editorial department-sama. They spotted mistakes that I could not find by myself, and even though the book was already released in the Kindle store, they went through the manuscript and found every last typo and missed word. After rereading it, there appeared lots of ridiculous parts.

Incidentally, among the impressions of people who read it at the time when it was self-published, the most frequent was "I can't read the title". Forgive me for that, "旅々" from "魔女の旅々" is read as "Tabitabi".

At first I simply thought "Since it's about a traveling witch, let's call it "Majo no Tabi" shall we? Would that be fine? Let's go with that," however, on top of it being too simple, it was apparent that the situation was likely to develop into a direction where it would be overlapped with another book when looked up, so I went with "Tabitabi". It was made with such feelings. There's no deep meaning behind it. And there's also no such word.

My pen-name from the time of self-publishing was "Jougi", but I didn't appear when people searched for me, just as I guessed. **|1|** So because of that, I added the surname to my pen-name.

That being the case, thank you for taking "Majo no Tabitabi" in hands.

This work is composed of weird stories with nothing but weird people appearing in them. In short, it's a weird story and a weird book. However, if a copy of such story was added to your bookshelves, nothing would make me happier. By the way, just

between us, it seems it's a good thing to add this book to the bookshelves. (Personal opinion)

If this book ever has a sequel, it might be even better to add it next to this book. (Personal Opinion)

Now to express my thanks.

The person in charge, M-san. As always, thank you very much. I will be troubling you from now on, but I would be happy if our association lasts long.....

Starting from the editorial department of GA Bunko, everyone from SB Creative. I can not thank you enough for picking me up. What more, I never even dreamt that it would be added to the launching line-up of a new label. This is off topic, but when I saw the launching line-up, I became truly anxious and wondered whether it was really okay to be side-by-side with such amazing people.... Rather, I still think so.

For Azul-sama who was in charge for the illustrations. Thank you very much for the lovely pictures. Ah, Ahh..... Elaina-san is so cute..... No, every character is cute already..... I'm spending days in smiles while looking back at the cover and illustrations with exceedingly lovely art. Thank you very much.

And lastly, everyone who took this book in hands. I'm glad I was able to meet you here. Let us meet again somewhere someday. Until then!

# TRANSLATOR NOTES

## AFTERWORD

**[1]** Jougi means ruler so if you searched for his pen-name, only rulers would appear.